WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL

ZONA GALE

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Billy Jones

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL

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SOMEWHERE BEYOND SEALED DOORS

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL

BY

ZONA GALE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOVES OF PELLEAS AND ETARRE,"
"FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
AGNES PELTON

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To

THE LITTLE GIRL ON CONANT STREET

AND TO THE

MEMORY OF HER GRANDMOTHER

HARRIET BEERS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	In Those Days	1
II.	In No Time	16
III.	One for the Money	35
IV.	The Picnic	53
V.	The King's Trumpeter	77
VI.	My Lady of the Apple Tree	103
VII.	The Princess Romancia	118
VIII.	Two for the Show	147
IX.	Next Door	159
X.	What's Proper	173
XI.	Dolls	192
XII.	Bit-Bit	211
XIII.	Why	228
XIV.	King	247
XV.	King (*continued*)	281
XVI.	The Walk	307
XVII.	The Great Black Hush	315
XVIII.	The Decoration of Independence	329
XIX.	Earth-Mother	354
XX.	Three to Make Ready	375

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Somewhere beyond sealed doors . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Sat on a rock in the landscape and practised . . 32

Little by little she grew silent and refused to join in the games 128

But the minute folk left the room — ah, then! . 168

She settled everything in that way; she counted the petals of fennel daisies and blew thistle from dandelions 196

Then out of the valley a great deev arose . . 216

To see what running away is really like . . . 316

THERE used to be a little girl who does not come here any more. She is not dead, for when certain things happen, she stirs slightly where she is, perhaps deep within the air. When the sun falls in a particular way, when graham griddle cakes are baking, when the sky laughs sudden blue after a storm, or the town clock points in its clearest you-will-be-late way at nine in the morning, when the moonlight is on the midnight and nothing moves — then, somewhere beyond sealed doors, the little girl says something, and it is plain that she is here all the time.

You little child who never have died, in these stories I am trying to tell you that now I come near to understanding you. I see you still, with your over-long hair and your over-much chattering, your naughtiness and your dreams. I know the qualities that made you disagreeable and those that made you dear, and I look on you somewhat as spirit looks on spirit, understanding from within. I wish that we could live it again, you and I — not all of it, by any means, and not for a serious business; but now and then, for a joy and for an idleness. And this book is a way of trying to do it over again, together.

Will you care to come from the quiet where you are, near to me and yet remote? I think that you will come, for you were wont untiringly to wonder about me. And now here I am, come true, so faintly like her whom you dreamed, yet so like you yourself, your child, fruit of your spirit, you little shadowy mother. . . .

If only words were moments
And I knew where they fly,
I'd make a tale of time itself
To tell you by and bye.

If only words were fathoms
That let us by for pearls,
I'd make a story ocean-strange
For little boys and girls.

But words are only shadow things.
I summon all I may.
Oh, see — they try to spell out Life!
Let's act it, like a play.

When I was a Little Girl

I

IN THOSE DAYS

In those days time always bothered us. It went fast or it went slow, with no one interfering. It was impossible to hurry it or to hold it back.

"Only ten weeks more," we invariably said glibly, when the Spring term began.

"Just think! We've—got—t-e-n—weeks!" we told one another at the beginning of vacation, what time we came home with our books, chanting it:—

"*No more Latin,*
No more French,
No more sitting on a hard wood bench."

—both chorally and antiphonally chanting it.

Yet, in spite of every encouragement, the Spring term lasted immeasurably and the Summer vacation melted. It was the kindred difference of experience respectively presented

by a bowl of hot ginger tea and an equal bulk of ice-cream.

In other ways time was extraordinary. We used to play with it: "Now is now. But now that other Now is gone and a Then is now. How did it do it? How do all the Nows begin?"

"When is the party?" we had sometimes inquired.

"To-morrow," we would be told.

Next morning, "Now it's to-morrow!" we would joyfully announce, only to be informed that it was, on the contrary, to-day. But there was no cause for alarm, for now the party, it seemed, had changed too, and that would be to-day. It was frightfully confusing.

"*When* is to-morrow?" we demanded.

"When to-day stops being," they said.

But never, never once did to-day stop that much. Gradually we understood and humoured the pathetic delusion of the Grown-ups: *To-day lasted always and yet the poor things kept right on forever waiting for to-morrow.*

As for me, I had been born without the time sense. If I was told that we would go to drive in ten minutes, I always assumed that I could finish dressing my doll, tidy my play-house, put

her in it with all her family disposed about her down to the penny black-rubber baby dressed in yarn, wash my face and hands, smooth my hair (including the protests that these were superfluous), make sure that the kitten was shut in the woodshed . . . long before most of which the family was following me, haling me away, chiding me for keeping older folk waiting, and the ten minutes were gone far by. Who would have thought it? Ten minutes seem so much.

And if I went somewhere with permission to stay an hour! Then the hour stretched invitingly before me, a vista lined with crowding possibilities.

"How long can you stay?" we always promptly asked our guests, for there was a feeling that the quality of the game to be entered on depended on the time at our disposal. But when they asked me, it never was conceivable that anything so real as a game should be dependent on anything so hazy as time.

"Oh, a whole hour!" I would say royally. "Let's play City."

With this attitude Delia Dart, who lived across the street, had no patience. Delia was

definite. Her evenly braided hair, her square finger tips, her blunt questions, her sense of what was due to Delia — all these were definite.

"City!" she would burst out. "You can't play City unless you've got all afternoon."

And Margaret Amelia and Betty Rodman, who were pretty definite too, would back Delia up; but since they usually had permission to stay all afternoon, they would acquiesce when I urged: "Oh, well, let's start in anyhow." Then about the time the outside wall had been laid up in the sand-pile and we had selected our building sites, the town clock would strike my hour, which would be brought home to me only by Delia saying: —

"Don't you go. Will she care if you're late?"

On such occasions we never used the substantive, but merely "she." It is worth being a child to have a sense of values so simple and unassailable as that.

"I'm going to do just this much. I can run all the way home," I would answer; and I would begin on my house walls. But when these were done, and the rooms defined by moist sand partitions, there was all the fascination of its garden, with walks to be outlined with a

shingle and sprays of Old Man and cedar to be stuck in for trees, and single stems of Fever-few and Sweet Alyssum or Flowering-currant and Bleeding-heart for the beds, and Catnip for the borders, and a chick from Old-Hen-and-Chickens for a tropical plant. We would be just begun on the stones for the fountain when some alien consciousness, some plucking at me, would recall the moment. And it would be half an hour past my hour.

"You were to come home at four o'clock," Mother would say, when I reached there panting.

"*Why* did I have to come home at four o'clock?" I would finally give way to the sense of great and arbitrary wrong.

She always told me. I think that never in my life was I bidden to do a thing, or not to do it, "because I tell you to." But never once did a time-reason seem sufficient. What were company, a nap-because-I-was-to-sit-up-late, or having-to-go-somewhere-else beside the reality of that house which I would never occupy, that garden where I would never walk?

"You can make it the next time you go to Delia's," Mother would say. But I knew that this was impossible. I might build another

house, adventure in another garden; this one was forever lost to me.

". . . only," Mother would add, "you can not go to Delia's for . . ." she would name a period that yawned to me as black as the abyss. ". . . because you did not come home to-day when you were told." And still time seemed to me indefinite. For now it appeared that I should never go to Delia's again.

I thought about it more and more. What was this time that was laid on us so heavy? Why did I have to get up *because* it was seven o'clock, go to school *because* it was nine, come home from Delia's *because* the clock struck something else . . . above all, why did I have to go to bed *because* it was eight o'clock?

I laid it before my little council.

"Why do we have to go to bed because it's bed-time?" I asked them. "Which started first — bed-time or us?"

None of us could tell. Margaret Amelia Rodman, however, was of opinion that bed-time started first.

"Nearly everything was here before we were," she said gloomily. "We haven't got anything in the house but the piano and the rabbits that

wasn't first before us. Mother told father this morning that we'd had our stair-carpet fifteen years."

We faced that. Fifteen years. Nearly twice as long as we had lived. If a stair-carpet had lasted like that, what was the use of thinking that we could find anything to control on the ground of our having been here first?

Delia Dart, however, was a free soul. "*I* think we begun before bed-time did," she said decidedly. "Because when we were babies, we didn't have any bed-time. Look at babies now. They don't have bed-times. They sleep all the while."

It was true. Bed-time must have started after we did. Besides, we remembered that it was movable. Once it had been half past seven. Now it was eight. Delia often sat up, according to her own accounts, much later even than this.

"Grown-ups don't have any bed-time either," Betty took it up. "They're like babies."

This was a new thought. How strange that Grown-ups and babies should share this immunity, and only we be bound.

"Who *made* bed-time?" I inquired irritably.

"S-h-h !" said Delia. "God did."

"I don't believe it," I announced flatly.

"Well," said Delia, "anyway, he makes us sleepy."

This I also challenged. "Then why am I sleepier when I go to church evenings than when I play Hide-and-go-seek in the Brice's barn evenings ?" I submitted.

This was getting into theology, and Delia used the ancient method.

"We aren't supposed to know all those things," she said with superiority, and the council broke up.

That night I brought my revolt into the open. At eight o'clock I was disposing the articles in my play-house so that they all touched, in order that they might be able to talk during the night. It was well-known to me that inanimate objects must touch if they would carry on conversation. The little red chair and the table, the blue paper-weight with a little trembling figure inside, the silver vase, the mug with "Remember me" in blue letters, the china goat, all must be safely settled so that they might while away the long night in talk. The blue-glass paper weight with the horse and

rider within, however, was uncertain what he wanted to companion. I tried him with the china horse and with the treeful of birds and with the duck in a boat, but somehow he would not group. While he was still hesitating, it came: —

"Bed-time, dear," they said.

I faced them at last. I had often objected, but I had never reasoned it out.

"I'm not sleepy," I announced serenely.

"But it's bed-time," they pressed it mildly.

"Bed-time is when you're sleepy," I explained. "I'm not sleepy. So it can't be bed-time."

"Bed-time is eight o'clock," they said with a hint of firmness, and picked me up strongly and carried me off; and to my expostulation that the horse and his rider in the blue paper-weight would have nobody to talk to all night, they said that he wouldn't care about that; and when I wept, they said I was cross, and that proved it was Bed-time.

There seemed no escape. But once — once I came near to understanding. Once the door into Unknown-about Things nearly opened for me, and just for a moment I caught a glimpse.

I had been told to tidy my top bureau drawer.

I have always loathed tidying my top bureau drawer. It is so unlike a real task. It is made up of odds and ends of tasks that ought to have been despatched long ago and gradually, by process of throwing away, folding, putting in boxes, hanging up, and other utterly uninteresting operations. I can create a thing, I can destroy a thing, I can keep a thing as it was; but to face a top bureau drawer is none of these things. It is a motley task, unclassified, without honour, a very tag-end and bobtail of a task, fit for nobody.

I was thinking things that meant this, and hanging out the window. It was a gentle day, like a perfectly natural human being who wants to make friends and will not pretend one iota in order to be your friend. I remember that it was a still day, that I loved, not as I loved Uncle Linas and Aunt Frances, who always played with me and gave me things, but as I loved Mother and father when they took me somewhere with them, on Sunday afternoons. . . . I had a row of daffodils coming up in the garden. I began pretending that they were marching down the border, down the border, down the border to the big rock by the cook-

ing-apple tree — why of course! I had never thought of it, but that rock was where they got their gold. . . .

A house-wren came out of a niche in the porch and flew down to the platform in the boxalder, where father was accustomed to feed the birds. The platform was spread with muffin crumbs. The little wren ate, and flew to the clothes-line and poured forth his thankful exquisite song. I had always felt regret that we had no clothes reel that would whirl like a witch in the wind, but instead merely a system of clothes-lines, duly put up on Mondays; but the little wren evidently did not know the difference.

"Abracadabra, make me sing like that . . ." I told him. But I hadn't said the right thing, and he flew away and left me not singing. I began thinking what if he *had* made me sing, and what if I had put back my head and gone downstairs singing like a wren, and gone to arithmetic class singing like a wren, and nobody could have stopped me, and nobody would have wanted to stop me. . . .

. . . I leaned over the sill, holding both arms down and feeling the blood flow down and weight my fingers like a pulse. What if I

should fall out the window and instead of striking the ground hard, as folk do when they fall out of windows, I should go softly through the earth, and feel it pressing back from my head and closing together behind my heels, and pretty soon I should come out, plump . . . before the Root of Everything and sit there for a long time and watch it grow. . . .

. . . I looked up at the blue, glad that I was so near to it, and thought how much pleasanter it would be to fly right away through the blue and see what colour it was lined with. Pink, maybe — rose-pink, which showed through at sunset when the sun leaped at last through the blue and it closed behind him. Rose-pink, like my best sash and hair-ribbons. . . .

That brought me back. My best sash and hair-ribbons were in my top drawer. Moreover, there were foot-steps on the stairs and at the very door.

"Have you finished?" Mother asked.

I had not even opened the drawer.

"You have been up here one hour," Mother said, and came and stood beside me. "What have you been doing?"

I began to tell her. I do not envy her her

quandary. She knew that I was not to be too heavily chided and yet — the top drawers of this world must be tidied.

"Think!" she said. "That Hour has gone out the window without its work being done. And now this Hour, that was meant for play, has got to work. But not you! You've lost your turn. Now it's Mother's turn."

She made me sit by the window while she tidied the drawer. I was not to touch it — I had lost my turn. While she worked, she talked to me about the things she knew I liked to talk about. But I could not listen. It is the only time in my life that I have ever really frantically wanted to tidy a top bureau drawer of anybody's.

"Now," she said when she had done, "this last Hour will meet the Hour-before-the-last, and each of them will look the way the other ought to have looked, and they will be all mixed up. And all day I think they will keep trying to come back to you to straighten them out. But you can't do it. And they'll have to be each other forever and ever and ever."

She went away again, and I was left face to face with the very heart of this whole perplexing Time business: those two Hours that would

always be somewhere trying to be each other, forever and ever, and always trying to come back for me to straighten them out.

Were there Hours out in the world that were sick hours, sick because we had treated them badly, and always trying to come back for folk to make them well?

And were there Hours that were busy and happy somewhere because they had been well used and they didn't have to try to come back for us to patch them up?

Were Hours like that? Was Time like that?

When I told Delia of the incident, she at once characteristically settled it.

"Why, if they wasn't any time," she said, "we'd all just wait and wait and wait. They couldn't have that. So they set something going to get us going to keep things going."

Sometimes, in later life, when I have seen folk lunch because it is one o'clock, worship because it is the seventh day, go to Europe because it is Summer, and marry because it is high time, I wonder whether Delia was not right. Often and often I have been convinced that what Mother told me about the Hours trying to come back to get one to straighten them out is true

with truth undying. And I wish, that morning by the window, and at those grim, inevitable Bed-times, that I, as I am now, might have told that Little Me this story about how, just possibly, they first noticed time and about what, just possibly, it is.

II

IN NO TIME

BEFORE months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds were counted and named, consider how peculiar it all must have seemed. For example, when the Unknown-about Folk of those prehistoric times wished to know *when* a thing would happen, of course they can have had no word *when*, and no answer. If a little Prehistoric Girl gave a party, she cannot have known when to tell her guests to come, so she must have had to wait until the supper was ready and then invite them; and if they were not perfectly-bred little guests, they may have been offended because they hadn't been invited before — only they would not have known how to say or to think "before," so they cannot have been quite sure what they were offended at; but they may have been offended anyway, as happens now with that same kind of guest. And if a little Prehistoric Boy asked his father

to bring him a new eagle or a new leopard for a pet, and his father came home night after night and didn't bring it, the Prehistoric Boy could not say, "*When* will you bring it, sir?" because there was no when, so he may have asked a great many other questions, and been told to sit in the back of the cave until he could do better. Nobody can have known how long to boil eggs or to bake bread, and people must have had to come to breakfast and just sit and wait and wait until things were done. Worst of all, nobody can have known that time is a thing to use and not to waste. Since they could not measure it, they could not of course tell how fast it was slipping away, and they must have thought that time was theirs to do with what they pleased, instead of turning it all into different things — this piece into sleep, this piece into play, this piece into tasks and exercise and fun. Just as, in those days, they probably thought that food is to be eaten because it tastes good and not because it makes the body grow, so they thought that time was a thing to be thrown away and not to be used, every bit — which is, of course, a prehistoric way to think. And nobody can have known about birthdays, and no

story can have started "Once upon a time," and everything must have been quite different.

About then, — only of course they didn't know it was then — a Prehistoric Mother said one morning to her Prehistoric Little Daughter: —

"Now, Vertebrata, get your practising done and then you may go to play." (It wasn't a piano and it wasn't an organ, but it was a lovely, reedy, blow-on-it thing, like a pastoral pipe, and little girls always sat about on rocks in the landscape, as soon as they had had their breakfasts, and practised.)

So Vertebrata took her reed pipes and sat on a rock in the landscape and practised — all of what we now know (but she did not know) would be five minutes. Then she came in the cave, and tossed the pipes on her bed of skins, and then remembered and hung them in their place above the fireplace, and turned toward the doorway. But her mother, who was roasting flesh at the fire, called her back.

"Vertebrata," she said, "did I not tell you to practise?"

"I did practise," said Vertebrata.

"Then practise and practise," said her mother,

not knowing how else to tell her to do her whole hour. Her mother didn't know hours, but she knew by the feel of her feelings when Vertebrata had done enough.

So Vertebrata sat on a rock and did five minutes more, and came and threw her pipes on her bed of skins, and remembered and hung them up, and then turned toward the door of the cave. But her mother looked up from the flesh-pot and called her back again.

"Vertebrata," she said, "do you want mother to have to speak to you again?"

"No, *indeed*, muvver," said her little daughter.

"Then practise and practise and practise," said her mother. "If you can't play when you grow up, what will people think?"

So Vertebrata went back to her landscape rock, and this thing was repeated until Vertebrata had practised what we now know (but she did not know) to have been a whole hour. And you can easily see that in order to bring this about, what her mother must have said to her the last time of all was this:—

"I want you to practise and practise and practise and practise and practise and practise and practise and practise and practise and prac-

tise and practise and practise — " *or* something almost as long.

Now of course it was very hard for her mother to say all this besides roasting the flesh and tidying the cave, so she made up her mind that when her Prehistoric Husband came home, he must be told about it. And when the sun was at the top of the sky and cast no shadow, and the flesh was roasted brown and fragrant, she dressed it with pungent herbs, and raked the vegetables out of the ashes and hid the dessert in the cool wall of the cave — *that* was a surprise — and spread the flat rock at the door of the cave and put vine-leaves in her hair and, with Vertebrata, set herself to wait.

There went by what we now know to have been noon, and another hour, and more hours, and all afternoon, and all early twilight, and still her Prehistoric Husband did not come home to dinner. Vertebrata was crying with hunger, and the flesh and the vegetables were ice-cold, and the Prehistoric Wife and Mother sat looking straight before her without smiling. And then, just as the moon was rising red over the soft breast of the distant wood, the Prehistoric Father appeared, not looking as if he had done anything.

"Is dinner ready?" he asked pleasantly.

Now this was the last straw, and the Prehistoric Wife and Mother said so, standing at the door of the cave, with Vertebrata crying in the offing.

"Troglodyte," she said sadly (that was what she called him), "dinner has been ready and ready and ready and ready and ready and ready and ready . . ." and she showed him the ice-cold roasted flesh and vegetables.

"I'm *so* sorry, dearest. I never knew," said the Troglodyte, contritely, and did everything in the world that he could do to show her how sorry he was. He made haste to open his game-bag, and he drew out what food he had killed, and showed her a soft, cock-of-the-rock skin for a cap for her and a white ptarmigan breast to trim it with, and at last she said — because nobody can stay offended when the offender is sorry: —

"Well, dear, say no more about it. We'll slice up the meat and it will do very well cold, and I'll warm up the potatoes with some brown butter (or the like). But hurry and bathe or I'll be ready first *again*."

So he hurried and bathed in the brook, and

the cave smelled savoury of the hot brown butter, and Vertebrata had a Grogan tail stuck in her hair, and presently they sat down to supper. And it was nearly eight o'clock, but they didn't know anything about *that.*

When the serious part of supper was done, and the dessert that was a surprise had been brought and had surprised and gone, Vertebrata's mother sat up very straight and looked before her without smiling. And she said:—

"Now, something must be done."

"About what, Leaf Butterfly?" her husband asked.

"Vertebrata doesn't practise enough and you don't come home to dinner enough," she answered, "and something must be done."

"I did practise — wunst," said Vertebrata.

"But you should practise once and once and once and once and once and once, and so on, and not have to be told each once," said her mother.

"I did come home to dinner," said the Prehistoric Husband, waving his hand at his empty platter.

"But you should come first and first and first and first and first, and so on, and not let the

dinner get ice-cold," said his wife. "Hear a thing," said she.

She sprinkled some salt all thick on the table and took the stick on which the flesh had been roasted, and in the salt she drew a circle.

"This," she said, "is the sky. And this place, at the top, is the top of the sky. And when the sun is at the top of the sky and there is no shadow, I will have ready the dinner, hot and sweet in the pot, and dessert — for a surprise. And when the sun is at the top of the sky and there is no shadow, do you come to eat it, *always*. That will be dinner."

"That is well," said the Troglodyte, like a true knight — for in those first days even true knights were willing that women should cook and cave-tidy for them all day long and do little else. But that was long ago and we must forgive it.

Then she made a mark in the salt at the edge of the circle a little way around from the first mark.

"When the sun is at the edge of the sky and all red, and the shadows are long, and the dark is coming, I will have ready berries and nuts and green stuffs and sweet syrups and other things that I shall think of — for you. And when the

sun is at the edge of the sky and all red, and the shadows are long, and the dark is coming, do you hurry to us, *always*. That will be supper."

"That is well," said the Troglodyte, like a true knight.

Then she drew the stick a long way round.

"This is sleep," she said. "This place here is waking, and breakfast. And then next the sun will be at the top of the sky again. And we will have dinner in the same fashion. And this is right for you. But what to do with the child I don't know, unless I keep her practising from the time the sun is at the top of the sky until it is at the bottom. For if she can't play when she grows up, what will people think?"

Now, while she said this, the Prehistoric Woman had been sitting with the stick on which the flesh had been roasted held straight up in her fingers, resting in the middle of the ring which she had made in the salt. And by now the moon was high and white in the sky. And the Man saw that the moon-shadow of the stick fell on the circle from its centre to beyond its edge. And presently he stretched out his hand and took the stick from her, and held it so and sat very still, thinking, thinking, thinking. . . .

"Faddie," said Vertebrata — she called him that for loving — "Faddie, will you make me a little bow and arrow and scrape 'em white?"

But her father did not hear her, and instead of answering he sprang up and began drawing on the soft earth before the cave a deep, deep circle, and he ran for the long stick that had carried his game-bag over his shoulder, and in the middle of the earth circle he set the stick.

"Watch a thing!" he cried.

Vertebrata and her mother, understanding little but trusting much, sat by his side. And together in the hot, white night the three watched the shadow of the stick travel on the dial that they had made. Of course there was no such thing as bed-time then, and Vertebrata usually sat up until she fell over asleep, when her mother carried her off to her little bed of skins; but this night she was so excited that she didn't fall over. For the stick-shadow moved like a finger; like, indeed, a living thing that had been in the world all the time without their knowing. And they watched it while it went a long way round the circle. Then her mother said, "Nonsense, Vertebrata, you must be sleepy now whether you know it or not," and she put her

to bed, Vertebrata saying all the way that she was wide awake, just like in the daytime. And when her mother went back outside the cave, the Man looked up at her wonderfully.

"Trachystomata," said he (which is to say "siren"), "if the sun-shadow will do the same thing as the moon-shadow, we have found a way to make Vertebrata practise enough."

In the morning when Vertebrata came out of the cave — she woke alone and dressed alone, just like being grown-up — she found her mother and her father down on their hands and knees, studying the circle in the soft earth and the long sun-shadow of the stick. And her mother called her and she went running to her. And her mother said: —

"Now we will have breakfast, dear, and then you get your pipes and come here and practise. And when you begin, we will lay a piece of bone where the shadow stands, and when I feel the feeling of enough, I will tell you, and you will stop practising, and we will lay another piece of bone on that shadow. And after this you will always practise from one bone to another, forever."

Vertebrata could hardly wait to have break-

fast before she tried it, and then she ran and brought her pipes and sat down beside the circle. And her father did not go to his hunting, or her mother to her cooking and cave-tidying, but they both sat there with Vertebrata, hearing her pipe and watching the shadow finger move, and waiting till her mother should feel the feeling of enough.

Now! Since the world began, the Hours, Minutes, and Seconds had been hanging over it, waiting patiently until people should understand about them. But nobody before had ever, ever thought about them, and Vertebrata and her mother and her father were the very first ones who had even begun to understand.

So it chanced that in the second that Vertebrata began to pipe and the bone was laid on the circle, *that* Second (deep in the air and yet as near as time is to us) knew that it was being marked off at last on the soft circle of the earth, and so did the next Second, and the next, and the next, and the next, until sixty of them knew — and there was the first Minute, measured in the circle before the cave. And other Minutes knew what was happening, and they all came hurrying likewise, and they filled the air with ex-

quisite, invisible presences — all to the soft sound of little Vertebrata's piping. And she piped, and piped, on the lovely, reedy, blow-on-it instrument, and she made sweet music. And for the first time in her little life, her practising became to her not merely practising, but music-making — there, while she watched the strange Time-shadow move.

"J — o — y!" cried the Seconds, talking among themselves. "People are beginning to know about us. It is *time* that they should."

"Ah!" they cried again. "We can go faster than anything."

"Think of all of our poor brothers and sisters that have gone, without anybody knowing they were here," they mourned.

"Pipe, pipe, pipe," went Vertebrata, and the little Seconds danced by almost as if she were making them with her piping.

The Minutes, too, said things to one another — who knows if Time is so silent as we imagine? May not all sorts of delicate conversations go on in the heart of time about which we never know anything — Second talking with Second, and Minute answering to Minute; and the grave Hours, listening to everything we say and seeing

everything we do, confiding things to the Day about us and about Eternity from which they have come. I cannot tell you what they say about you — you will know that, if you try to think, and especially if you stand close to a great clock or hear it boom out in the night. And I cannot tell you what they say about Eternity. But I think that this may be one of the songs that they sing: —

SONG OF THE MINUTES

We are a garland for men,
We are flung from the first gate of Time,
From the touch that opened the minds of men
Down to the breath of this rhyme.

We are the measure of things,
The rule of their sweep and stir,
But whenever a little girl pipes and sings,
We will keep time for her.

We are a touching of hands
From those in the murk of the earth,
Through all who have garnered life in their hands
And wrought it from death unto birth.

We are the measure of things,
The rule of their stir and sweep,
And wherever a little child weeps or sings
It is his soul we keep.

At last, when sixty Minutes had danced and chorussed past, there was, of course, the first rosy Hour ever to have her coming and passing marked since earth began. And when the Hour was gone, Vertebrata's mother felt the feeling of enough, and she said to Vertebrata: —

"That will do, dear. Now you may go and play."

That was the first exact hour's practising that ever any little girl did by any sort of clock.

"Ribbon-fish mine," said the Prehistoric Man to his wife, when Vertebrata had finished, "I have been thinking additional thoughts. Why could we not use the circle in other ways?"

"What ways, besides for your coming home and for Vertebrata's practising?" asked the Prehistoric Woman; but we must forgive her for knowing about only those two things, for she was a very Prehistoric Woman indeed.

"Little bones might be laid between the big bones," said the Man — and by that of course

he meant measuring off minutes. "By certain of them you could roast flesh and not kneel continually beside the fire. By certain of them you could boil eggs, make meet the cakes, and not be in peril of burning the beans. Also . . ."

He was silent for a moment, looking away over the soft breast of the wood where the sun was shining its utmost, because it has so many reasons.

"When I look at that moving finger on the circle thing," he said slowly, "it feels as if whoever made the sun were saying things to me, but with no words. For his sun moves, and the finger on the circle thing moves with it — as if it were telling us how long to do this thing, and how long to do that thing — you and me and Vertebrata. And we must use every space between the bones — and whoever made the sun is telling us this, but with no words."

The Prehistoric Woman looked up at her husband wonderfully.

"You are a great man, Troglodyte!" she told him.

At which he went away to hunt, feeling for the first time in his prehistoric life as if there were a big reason, somewhere out in the air, why he should get as much done as he could.

And the Prehistoric Woman went at her baking and cave-tidying, but always she ran to the door of the cave to look at the circle thing, as if it bore a great message for her to make haste, a message with no words.

As for Vertebrata, she had taken her pipes and danced away where, on rocks in the landscape, the other little Prehistorics sat about, getting their practising done. She tried to tell them all about the circle thing, waving her pipes and jumping up and down to make them understand, and drawing circles and trying to play to them about it on her pipes; and at last they understood a little, like understanding a new game, and they joined her and piped on their rocks all over the green, green place. And the Seconds and Minutes and Hours, being fairly started to be measured, all came trooping on, to the sound of the children's piping.

When the sun was at the top of the sky, Vertebrata remembered, and she stuck a stick in the ground and saw that there was almost no shadow. So she left the other children and ran very hard toward her own cave. And when she had nearly reached it, somebody overtook her, also running very hard.

SAT ON A ROCK IN THE LANDSCAPE AND PRACTISED.

"Faddie!" she called, as she called when she meant loving — and he swung her up on his shoulder and ran on with her. And they burst into the open space before the cave just as the shadow-stick pointed straight to the top of the circle thing.

There, before the door of the cave, was the flat rock, all set with hot baked meat and toothsome piles of roast vegetables and beans that were not burned. And the Prehistoric Woman, with vine-leaves in her hair, was looking straight before her and smiling. And that was the first dinner of the world that was ever served on time, and since that day, to be late for dinner is one of the things which nobody may do; and perhaps in memory of the Prehistoric Woman, when this occurs, the politest ladies may always look straight before them *without smiling*.

"Is dinner ready, Sea Anemone?" asked the Man.

"On the bone," replied his wife, pleasantly.

"What's for 'sert?" asked Vertebrata.

"It's a surprise," said her mother — which is always the proper answer to that question.

And while they sat there, the Days and Weeks

and Months and Years were coming toward them, faster than anything, to be marked off on the circle thing before the door, *and to be used.* And they are coming yet, like a message — but with no words.

III

ONE FOR THE MONEY

We were burying snow. Calista Waters had told us about it, when, late in April, snow was found under a pile of wood in our yard. We wondered why we had never thought of it before when snow was plentiful. We had two long tins which had once contained ginger wafers. These were to be packed with snow, fastened tight as to covers, and laid deep in the earth at a distance which, by means of spoons and hot water, we were now fast approaching.

It was Spring-in-earnest. The sun was warm, robins were running on the grass, already faintly greened where the snow had but just melted; a clear little stream flowed down the garden path and out under the cross-walk. The Wells's barn-doors stood open, somebody was beating a carpet, there was a hint of bonfire smoke in the air, there were little stirrings and sounds that belonged to Spring as the gasoline wood-cutter belonged to Fall.

Calista was talking.

"And then," she said, "some hot Summer day, when they're all sitting out on the lawn in the shade, with thin dresses and palm-leaf fans, we'll come and dig it up, and carry 'em big plates of feathery white snow, with a spoon stuck in."

We were silent, picturing their delight.

"Miss Messmore says," I ventured, not without hesitation, "that snow is all bugs."

In fact all of us had been warned without ceasing not to eat snow — but there were certain spots where it was beyond human power to resist it: Mr. Britt's fence, for instance, on whose pickets little squares of snow rested, which, eaten off by direct application of the lips, produced a slight illusion of partaking of caramels.

Delia stopped digging. "Maybe they won't eat it when we bring it to them in Summer?" she suggested.

"Then we will," said Calista, promptly. Of course they would not have the heart to forbid us to eat it in, say, June.

About a foot down in the ground we set the two tins side by side in an aperture lined and packed with snow and filled in with earth.

Over it we made a mound of all the snow we could find in the garden. Then we adjourned to the woodshed and sat on the sill and the sawbuck and the work-bench.

"What makes us give it away?" said Delia Dart, abruptly. "Why don't we sell it? We'd ought to get fifteen cents a dish for it by June."

We began a calculation, as rapid as might be. Each tin would hold at least six dishes.

"Why didn't we bury more?" said Calista, raptly. "Why didn't we bury a tubful?"

"It'd be an awful job to dig the hole," I objected. "Besides, they'd miss the tub."

The latter objection was insurmountable, so we went off to the garden to hunt pig-nuts. A tree of these delicacies grew in the midst of the potato patch, and some of the nuts were sure to have lain winter-long in the earth and to be seasoned and edible.

"Let's all ask to go to the Rodmans' this afternoon and tell Margaret Amelia and Betty about the snow," Calista suggested.

"I can't," I said. "I've got to go calling."

They regarded me pityingly.

"Can't you come over there afterwards?" they suggested.

This, I knew, was useless. We should not start calling till late. Besides, I should be hopelessly dressed up.

"Well," said Delia, soothingly, "*we'll* go anyhow. Are you going to call where there's children?"

"I don't think so," I said, darkly. "We never do."

That afternoon was one whose warm air was almost thickened by sun. The maple buds were just widening into little curly leaves; shadows were beginning to show; and everywhere was that faint ripple of running water in which Spring speaks. But then there was I, in my best dress, my best coat, my best shoes, my new hat, and gloves, faring forth to make calls.

This meant merely that there were houses where dwelt certain Grown-ups who expected me to be brought periodically to see them, an expectation persevered in, I believe, solely as a courtesy to my family. Twice a year, therefore, we set out; and the days selected were, as this one, invariably the crown and glory of all days: Days meet for cleaning out the playhouse, for occupying homes scraped with a shingle in the softened soil, for assisting at bon-

fires, to say nothing of all that was to be done in damming up the streams of the curbs and turning aside the courses of rivers.

The first call was on Aunt Hoyt — no true aunt, of course, but "aunt" by mutual compliment. She lived in a tiny house on Conant Street, set close to the sidewalk and shaded by an enormous mulberry tree. I sought out my usual seat, a little hardwood stool to whose top was neatly tacked a square of Brussels carpeting and whose cover, on being lifted, revealed a boot-jack, a shoe-brush, and a round box of blacking. The legs were deeply notched, and I amused myself by fitting my feet in the notches and occasionally coming inadvertently back to the floor with an echoing bump.

Now and then Aunt Hoyt, who was little and wrinkled, and whose glasses had double lenses in the middle so that I could not keep my eyes from them when she spoke, would turn to address an observation at me.

"How long her hair is! Do you think it is quite healthy for her to have such long hair? I'll warrant you don't like to have it combed, do you, dear?"

If Aunt Hoyt had only known the depth of

the boredom with which I had this inane question put to me! It was one of the wonders of my days: the utterly absurd questions that grown-up people could ask.

For example: "How do you do to-day?" What had any reasonable child to answer to that? Of course one was well. If one wasn't, one would be kept at home. If one wasn't, one wasn't going to tell anyway. Or, "What's she been doing lately?" Well! Was one likely to reply: "Burying snow. Hunting pig-nuts. Digging up pebbles from under the eaves. Making a secret play-house in the currant bushes that nobody knows about?" And unless one did thus tell one's inmost secrets, what was there left to say? And if one kept a dignified silence, one was sulky!

"She's a good little girl, I'm sure. Is she much help to you?" Aunt Hoyt asked that day, and patted my hair as we took leave. Dear Aunt Hoyt, I know now that she was lonesome and longed for children and, like many another, had no idea how to treat them, save by making little conversational dabs at them.

Then there was Aunt Arthur, who lived in a square brick house that always smelled cool.

At her house I invariably sat on a Brussels "kick-about" in the bay window and looked at a big leather "Wonders of Earth and Sea," with illustrations. Sometimes she let me examine a basket of shells that she herself had gathered at the beach — I used to look at her hands and at her big, flat cameo ring and marvel that they had been so near to the ocean. Once or twice, when I wriggled too outrageously, she would let me go into the large, dim parlour, with its ostrich egg hanging from the chandelier and the stuffed blackbird under an oval glass case before the high mirror, and the coral piled under the centre-table and the huge, gilt-framed landscape which she herself had painted. But this day, between the lace curtains hanging from their cornices, I caught sight of Calista and Delia racing up the hill to the Rodmans, and the entire parlour was, so to say, poisoned. In desperation I went back and asked for a drink of water — my ancient recourse when things got too bad.

Aunt Barker's was better — there was a baby there. But that day ill-luck went before me, for he was asleep and they refused to let me look at him, because they said that woke him up.

I disbelieved this, because I saw no reason in it, and nobody gave me a reason. I resolved to try it out the first time I was alone with a sleeping baby. I begged boldly to go outdoors, and Mother would have consented, but Aunt Barker said that a man was painting the lattice and that I would in every probability lean against the lattice, or brush the paint pots, or try to get a drink at the pump, which, I gathered, splashed everybody for miles around. So I sat in a patent rocker, and the only rift in a world of black cloud was that, by rocking far enough, the patent rocker could be made to give forth a wholly delectable squeak. Of course fate swiftly descended; I was bidden discontinue the squeak, and nothing remained to me.

Then we went to Grandma Bard's. I did not in the least know why, but the little rag-carpeted sitting-room, the singing kettle on the back of the coal stove, the scarlet geraniums on the window, the fascinating picture on the clock door, all entertained me at once. Grandma Bard wore a black lace cap, and she bade me sit by her and instantly gave me a peppermint drop from the pocket of her black sateen apron. She asked me no questions, but while she talked

with Mother, she laid together two rose-coloured — rose-coloured! — bits of her patchwork and quietly handed them to me to baste — none of your close stitches, only basting! Then she folded a newspaper and asked me to cut it and scallop it for her cupboard shelf. Then she found a handful of hickory nuts and brought me the tack-hammer and a flat-iron. . . .

"Oh, Mother, let's *not* go yet," I heard myself saying.

Going home — a delicate business, because stepping on any crack meant being poisoned forthwith — I tried to think it out: What was it that Mother and Grandma Bard knew that the rest didn't know? I gave it up. All I could think of was that they seemed to know me.

"Isn't Grandma Bard just grand?" I observed fervently.

"I'm afraid," Mother said thoughtfully, "that sometimes she has rather a hard time to get on."

I was still turning this in my mind as we passed the wood yard. The wood yard was a series of vacant lots where some mysterious person piled cords and cords of wood, which smelled sweet and green and gave out cool breaths. Sometimes the gasoline wood-cutter worked in

there, and we would watch till it had gone, and then steal in and bring away a baking-powder can full of sawdust. We never knew quite what to do with this sawdust. It was not desirable for mud-pies, and there was nothing that we knew of to be stuffed with it. Yet when we could, we always saved it. Perhaps it gave us an excuse to go into the wood yard, at which we always peeped as we went by. This day, I lagged a few steps behind and looked in, expectant of the same vague thing that we always expected, and never defined — a bonfire, a robber, an open cave, some changed aspect, I did not know what. And over by the sawdust pile, I saw, stepping about, a little girl in a reddish dress — a little girl whom I had never seen before. She looked up and saw me stand staring at her; and her gaze was so clear and direct that I felt obliged to say something in defence of my intrusion.

"Hello," I said.

Her face suddenly brightened. "Hello," she replied, and after a moment she added: "I thought you was going to say 'how de do.'"

A faint spark of understanding leapt between us. Dressed-up little girls usually did say "how

de do." It was only in a kind of unconscious deference to her own appearance that I had not done so. She was unkempt and ragged — her sleeve was torn from cuff to elbow.

"What you doing here?" I inquired, not averse to breaking the business of calling by a bit of gossip.

At this she did for the third time what I had been vaguely conscious of her having done: She glanced over her shoulder toward a corner of the yard which the piled wood concealed from me. I stepped forward and looked there.

On an end of wood-pile which we children had pulled down so as to make a slope to ascend its heights, a man was sitting. His head and shoulders were drooping, his legs were relaxed, and his hands were hanging loose, as if they were heavy. His eyes were closed and his lips were parted, yet about the face, with its fair hair and beard, there was something singularly attractive and gentle. He looked like a man who would tell you a story.

"Who's he?" I asked, and involuntarily I whispered.

The girl began backing a little away from me, her eyes on my face, her finger on her lips.

"It's my father," she said. "He's — resting."

I had never heard of a man resting in the daytime. Save, perhaps, on Sunday afternoons, this was no true function of men. I longed to look at the man and understand better, but something in the little girl's manner forbade me. I looked perplexedly after her. Then I peered round the fence post and saw my Mother standing under a tree, waiting for me. She beckoned. I took one more look inside the fence, and I saw the little girl sit down beside the sleeping man and fold her hands. The afternoon sun smote across the long wood yard, with its mysterious rooms made by the piling of the cords. It seemed impossible that this strange, still place, with its thick carpet of sawdust and its moist odours, should belong at all to the commonplace little street. And the two strange occupants gave the last touch to its enchantment.

I ran to overtake Mother, and I tried to tell her something of what I had seen. But some way my words gave nothing of the air of the place and of the two who waited there for something that I could not guess. Already I knew this about words — that they were all very well for *saying* a thing, but seldom for letting anybody *taste* what you were talking about.

I did not give up trying to tell it until we passed the Rodmans'. From the direction of their high-board fence I heard voices. Margaret Amelia and Betty and Delia and Calista were engaged in writing on the weathered boards of the fence with willows dipped in the clear-flowing gutter stream.

"Got it done?" I called mysteriously.

They turned, shaking their heads.

"It was all melted," they replied. "We couldn't find another bit."

"Oh, well," I cried, "you come on over after supper. I've got something to tell you."

"Something to tell you" would, of course, bring anybody anywhere. After supper they all came "over." It was that hour which only village children know — that last bright daylight of slanting sun and driven cows tinkling homeward; of front-doors standing open and neighbours calling to one another across the streets, and the sky warm in the quiet surface of some little water from whose bridge lads are tossing stones or hanging bare-footed from the timbers. We withdrew past the family, sitting on the side-porch, to the garden, where the sun was still golden on the tops of the maples.

"Mother says," I began importantly, "that she thinks Grandma Bard has a hard time to get along. Well, you know our snow? Well, you know you said you couldn't find any more to bury? Well, why don't we dig up ours, right now, and sell it and give the money to Grandma Bard?"

I must have touched some answering chord. Looking back, I cannot believe that this was wholly Grandma Bard. Could it be that the others had wanted to dig it up, independent of my suggestion? For there was not one dissenting voice.

The occasion seemed to warrant the best dishes. I brought out six china plates and six spoons. These would be used for serving my own family, while the others took the two cans and ran home with them to their families.

We dug rapidly now, the earth being still soft. To our surprise, the tops of the tins were located much nearer to the surface than we had supposed after our efforts of the morning to reach a great depth. The snow in which we had packed the cans had disappeared, but we made nothing of that. We drew out the cans,

had off their tops, and gazed distressfully down into clear water.

"It went and melted!" said Calista, resentfully.

In a way, she regarded it as her personal failure, since the ceremony had been her suggestion in the first place.

"Never mind, Calista," we said, "you didn't know."

Calista freely summed up her impressions.

"How *mean!*" she said.

We gravely gathered up the china plates and turned toward the house — and now I was possessed of a really accountable desire to get the plates back in their places as quickly as possible.

On the way a thought struck us simultaneously. Poor Grandma Bard!

"Let's all go to see her to-morrow anyhow," I suggested — largely, I am afraid, because the memory of my entertainment there was still fresh in my mind.

When, after a little while, we came round the house where the older ones were sitting, and heard them discussing uninteresting affairs, we regarded them with real sympathy. They had

so narrowly missed something so vastly, absorbingly interesting.

From Delia's room a voice came calling as, at intervals, other voices were heard calling other names throughout the neighbourhood — they were at one with the tinkle of the bells and the far-off yodel of the boys.

"Delia!"

"Good night," said Delia, briefly, and vanished without warning, as at the sound of any other taps. Soon after, the others also disappeared; and I crept up on the porch and lay down in the hammock.

"What's she been doing *now?*" somebody instantly asked me.

For a moment I thought of telling; but not seriously.

Evidently they had not expected an answer, for they went on talking.

" . . . yes, I had looked forward to it for a long while. Of course we had all counted on it. It was a great disappointment."

Somewhere in me the words echoed a familiar and recent emotion. So! They too had their disappointments . . . even as we. Of course whatever this was could have been nothing like

losing a fortune in melted snow. Still, I felt a new sympathy.

Mother turned to me.

"We are going to ask Grandma Bard to come to live with us," she said. "Will you like that?"

I sat up in the hammock. "All the time?" I joyfully inquired.

"For the rest of the time," Mother said soberly. "It seems as if one ought to take a child," she added to the others, "when one takes anybody. . . ."

"Still," said father, "till we get in our heads something of what the state owes to old folks, there's nobody but us to do its work. . . ."

I hardly heard them. To make this come true at one stroke! Even to be able to adopt a child! How easily they could do things, these grown-up ones; and how magnificently they acted as if it were nothing at all . . . like the giants planting city-seed and watching cities grow to the size and shape of giants' flower beds. . . .

They went on talking. Some of the things that they said we might have said ourselves. In some ways they were not so very different

from us. Yet think what they could accomplish.

Watching them and listening, there in the April twilight, I began to understand. It was not only that they could have their own way. But for the sake of things that we had never yet so much as guessed or dreamed, it was desirable to be grown up.

IV

THE PICNIC

It was Delia Dart who had suggested our Arbour Day picnic. "Let's have some fun Arbour Day," she said.

We had never thought of Arbour Day in that light. Exercises, though they presented the open advantage of escape from the school grind, were no special fun. Fun was something much more intimate and intangible, definite and mysterious, casual and thrilling — and other anomalies.

"Doing what?" we demanded.

"Oh," said Delia, restlessly, "go off somewheres. And eat things. And do something to tell about and make their eyes stick out."

We were not old enough really to have observed this formula for adventure. Hitherto we had always gone merely because we went. Yet all three motives appealed to us. And events fostered our faint intention. At the

opening of school that morning, Miss Messmore made an announcement. . . . I remember her grave way of smiling and silent waiting, so that we hung on what she was going to say.

"To-morrow," she said, "is Arbour Day. All who wish will assemble here at the usual hour in the afternoon. We are to plant trees and shrubs and vines about the schoolhouse. There will be something for each one to plant. But this is not required. Any who do not wish to be present may remain away, and these will not be marked absent. Only those may plant trees who wish to plant trees. I hope that all children will take advantage of their opportunity. Classes will now pass to their places."

Delia telegraphed triumphantly in several directions. We could hardly wait to confer. At recess we met immediately in the closet under the stairs, a closet intended primarily for chalk, erasers, brooms, and maps, but by virtue of its window and its privacy put to subuses of secret committee meetings.

"I told you," said Delia. And such was Delia's magnetism that we felt that she had told us. "Let's take our lunch and start as soon as we get out."

"Couldn't we go after the exercises?" Calista Waters submitted waveringly.

"*After!*" said Delia, scornfully. "It'll be three o'clock. *That's* no fun. We want to start by twelve, prompt, and stay till six."

Margaret Amelia Rodman bore out Delia's contention. She and Betty had a dozen eggs saved up from their pullets. They would boil them and bring them. "The pullets?" Calista demanded aghast and was laughed into subjection, and found herself agreeing and planning in order to get back into favour. Delia and the Rodmans were, I now perceive, born leaders of mediæval living.

"Why don't you wait till Saturday?" I finally said, from out a silence that had tried to produce this earlier. "That's only two days."

"Saturday!" said Delia. "Anybody can have a picnic Saturday. This is most as good as running away."

And of course it was. But . . .

"Who wants to plant a tree?" Delia continued. "They'll plant all they've got whether we're here or not, won't they?"

That was true. They would do so. It was clearly a selfish wish to participate that was

agitating Calista and me. In the end we were outvoted, and we went. Our families, it seemed, all took the same attitude: We need not plant trees if we did not wish to plant trees. Save in the case of Harold Rodman. He was ruled to be too small to walk to Prospect Hill, and he preferred going back to school to staying at home alone.

"I won't plant no tree, though," he announced resentfully, as we left him. "I'm goin' dig 'em all up!" he shouted after us. "Every one in the world!"

It was when I was running round the house to get my lunch that I came for the second time face to face with Mary Elizabeth.

Mary Elizabeth was sitting flat on the ground, cleaning knives which I recognized as our kitchen knives. This she was doing by a simple process, not unknown to me and consisting of driving the knife into the ground up to its black handle and shoving it rapidly up and down. It struck me as very strange that she should be there, in *our* back yard, cleaning *our* knives, and I somewhat resented it. For it is curious how much of a savage a little girl in a white apron can really be. But then I did not at once recognize

her as the girl whom I had seen in the wood yard.

I remember her sometimes as I saw her that day. She had straight brown hair the colour of my own, and her thick pig-tail, which had fallen over her shoulder as she worked, was tied with red yarn. Her face was a lovely, even cream colour, with no freckles such as diversified my own nose, and with no other colour in her cheek. Her hands were thin and veined, with long, agile fingers. The right sleeve of her reddish plaid dress was by now slit almost to the shoulder, and her bare arm showed, and it was nearly all wrist. She had on a boy's heavy shoes, and these were nearly without buttons.

"What you doing?" I inquired, coming to a standstill.

She lifted her face and smiled, not a flash of a smile, but a slow smile of understanding me.

"This," she replied, and went on with her task.

"What's your name?" I demanded.

"Mary Elizabeth," she answered, and did not ask me my name. This was her pathetic way of deference to me because my clothing and my "station" were other than hers.

I went on to the house, but I went, looking back.

"Mother," I said, "who is she? The little girl out there."

While she put up my lunch in the Indian basket, Mother told me how Mary Elizabeth had come that morning asking for something to do. She had set her to work, and meanwhile she was finding out who she was. "I gave her something to eat," Mother said. "And I have never seen even you so hungry." Hungry and having no food. I had never heard of such a thing at first hand — not nearer than in books and in Sunday school. But . . . hungry that way, and in our yard!

It was chiefly this that accounted for my invitation to her — this, and the fact that, as she came to the door to tell my Mother good-bye and to take what she had earned, she gave me again that slow, understanding-me smile. Anyway, as we walked toward the gate, I overtook her with my Indian basket.

"Don't you want to come to the picnic with us?" I said.

She stared at me. "What do you do?" she asked.

"Why," I said, "a picnic? Eat in the woods and — and get things, and sit on the grass. Don't you think they're fun?"

"I never was to one," she answered, but I saw how she was watching me almost breathlessly.

"Come on, then," I insisted carelessly.

"Honest?" she said. "Me?"

When she understood, I remember how she walked beside me, looking at me as if she might at any moment find out her mistake.

Delia, waiting impatiently at our gate with her own basket, — somehow I never waited at the gates of others, but it was always they who waited at mine, — bade me hurry, stared at Mary Elizabeth, and serenely turned her back on her.

"This," I said, "is Mary Elizabeth. I asked her to go to our picnic. She's going. I've got enough lunch. This is Delia."

I suppose that they looked at each other furtively — so much of the stupidity of being a knight with one's visor lowered yet hangs upon us — and then Delia plucked me, visibly, by the sleeve and addressed me, audibly, in the ear.

"What'd you go and do that for?" said she. And I who, at an early age, resented being

plucked by the sleeve as a bird resents being patted on the head, or the wall of any personality trembles away when it is tapped, took Mary Elizabeth by the hand and marched on to meet the Rodmans and Calista.

Calista was a vague little soul, with no sense of facts. She was always promising to walk with two girls at recess, which was equivalent to asking two to be her partners in a quadrille. It simply could not be done. So Calista was forever having to promise to run errands with someone after school to make amends for not having walked with her at recess. She seldom had a grievance of her own, but she easily fell in with the grievances of others. When I presented Mary Elizabeth to her, Calista received her serenely as a part of the course of human events; and so I think she would have continued to regard her, without great attention and certainly with no criticism, had she not received the somewhat powerful suggestion of Delia and Margaret Amelia and Betty Rodman. The three fell behind Mary Elizabeth and me as we trotted down the long street on which the April sun smote with Summer heat.

" — over across the railroad tracks and picks

up tin cans and old rubbers and sells 'em and drinks just awful and got ten children and got arrested," I heard Delia recounting.

"The idea. To our picnic," said Margaret Amelia's thin-edged voice.

"Without asking us," Betty whispered, anxious to think of something of account to say.

Mary Elizabeth heard. I have seen that look of dumb, unresentful suffering in many a human face — in the faces of those who, by the laws of sport or society or of jurisprudence, find no escape. She had no anger, and what she felt must have been long familiar. "I'd better go home," she said to me briefly.

I still had her by the hand. And it was, I am bound to confess, as no errant but chiefly as antagonist to the others that I pulled her along. "You got to come," I reminded her. "You said you would."

It was cruel treatment, by way of kindness. The others, quickly adapting themselves, fell into the talk of expeditions, which is never quite the same as any other talk; and the only further notice that they took of Mary Elizabeth was painstakingly to leave her out. They never said anything to her, and when she ventured

some faint word, they never answered or noticed or seemed to hear. In later years I have had occasion to observe, among the undeveloped, these same traces of tribal antagonisms.

As we went, I had time to digest the hints which I had overheard concerning Mary Elizabeth's estate. I knew that a family having many children had lately come to live "across the tracks," and that, because of our anxiety to classify, the father was said to be a drunkard. I looked stealthily at Mary Elizabeth, with a certain respect born of her having experience so transcending my own. Telling how many drunken men and how many dead persons, if any, we had seen was one of our modes of recreation when we foregathered. Technically Mary Elizabeth was, I perceived, one of the vague "poor children" for whom we had long packed baskets and whom we used to take for granted as barbarously as they used to take for granted the plague. Yet now that I knew one such, face to face, she seemed so much less a poor child than a little girl. And though she said so little, she had a priceless manner of knowing what I was driving at, which not even Margaret Amelia and Betty Rodman had, and they were

the daughters of an assemblyman, and had a furnace in their house, and had had gold watches for Christmas. It was very perplexing.

"First one finds a May-flower's going to be a princess!" Delia shouted. Delia was singularly unimaginative; the idea of royalty was her single entrance to fields of fancy. The stories that I made up always began "Once there was a fairy"; Margaret and Betty started at gnomes and dwarfs; Calista usually selected a poor little match girl or a boot-black asleep in a piano box; but Delia invariably chose a royal family, with many sons.

We ran, shouting, across the stretch of scrub-oak which stretched where the town blocks of houses and streets gave it up and reverted to the open country. To reach this unprepossessing green place, usually occupied by a decrepit wagon and a pile of cord-wood, was like passing through a doorway into the open. We expressed our freedom by shouting and scrambling to be princesses — all, that is, save Mary Elizabeth. She went soberly about, a little apart, and I wished with all my heart that she might find the first May-flower; but she did not do so.

We hunted for wind-flowers. It was on Pros-

pect Hill that these first flowers — wind-flowers, pasque flowers, May-flowers, however one has learned to say them — were found in Spring — the *anemone patens* which, next to pussy-willows themselves, meant to us Spring. A week before Nellie Pitmouth had brought to school the first that we had seen. Nellie had our pity because she drove the cows to pasture before she came to school, but she had her reward, for it was always she who found the first spoils. I remember those mornings when I would reach school to find a little group about Nellie in whose hands would be pussy-willows, or the first violets, or our rarely found white violets. For a little while, in the light of real events like these, Nellie enjoyed distinction. Then she relapsed into her usual social obscurity and the stigma of her gingham apron which she wore even on half holidays. This day we pressed hard for her laurels, scrambling in the deep mould and dead leaves in search of the star faces on silvery, silken, furry stems. We hoped untiringly that we might some day find arbutus, which grew in abundance only eighteen miles away, on the hills. In Summer we patiently looked for wintergreen, which they were always finding

farther up the river. And from the undoubted dearth of both we escaped with a pretence to the effect that we were under a spell, and that some day, the witch having died, we should walk on our hill and find the wintergreen come and the arbutus under the leaves.

By five o'clock we had been hungry for two hours, and we spread our lunch on the crest. Prospect Hill was the place to which we took our guests when we had them. It was the wide west gateway of the town, where through few ventured, for it opened out on the bend of the little river, navigable only to rowboats and launches, and flowing toward us from the west. You stood at the top of a sharp declivity, and it was like seeing a river face to face to find it flowing straight toward you, out of the sky, bearing little green islands and wet yellow sandbars. It almost seemed as if these must come floating toward us and bringing us everything. . . . For these were the little days, when we still believed that everything was necessary.

We quickly despatched the process of "trading off," a sandwich for an apple, a cooky for a cake, and so on, occasionally trading back

before the bargain had been tasted. Mary Elizabeth sat at one side; even after I had divided my lunch and given her my basket for a plate, she sat a very little away from us — or it may be my remembrance of her aloofness that makes this seem so. Each of the others gave her something from her basket — but it was the kind of giving which makes one know what a sad word is the word "bestow." They "bestowed" these things. Since that time, when I have seen folk administering charity, I have always thought of the manner, ill-bred as is all condescension, in which we must have shared our picnic food with Mary Elizabeth.

I believe that this is the first conversation that ever I can remember. Up to this time, I had talked as naturally as the night secretes dreams, with no sense of responsibility for either to mean anything. But that day I became uncomfortably conscious of the trend of the talk.

"I have to have my new dress tried on before supper," Delia announced, her back to the river and her mouth filled with a jam sandwich. "It's blue plaid, with blue buttons and blue tassels on," she volunteered.

"My new dress Aunt Harriet brought me

from the City isn't going to be made up till last day of school," Margaret Amelia informed us. "It's got pink flowers in and it cost sixty cents a yard."

"Margaret and I are going to have white shoes before we go visiting," Betty remembered.

"I got two new dresses that ain't made up yet. Mamma says I got so many I don't need them," observed Calista, with an indifferent manner and a soft, triumphant glance. Whereat we all sat silent.

I struggled with the moment, but it was too much for me.

"I got a white silk lining to my new dress," I let it be known. "It's made, but I haven't had it on yet. China silk," I added conscientiously. Then, moved perhaps by a common discomfort, we all looked toward Mary Elizabeth. I think I loved her from that moment.

"None of you's got the new style sleeves," she said serenely, and held aloft the arm whose sleeve was slit from wrist to shoulder.

We all laughed together, but Delia pounced upon the arm. She caught and held it.

"What's that on your arm?" she cried, and we all looked. From the elbow up the skin was

mottled a dull, ugly purple, as if rough hands had been there.

Mary Elizabeth flushed. "Ain't you ever had any bruises on you?" she inquired in a tone so finely modulated that Delia actually hastened to defend herself from the impeachment of inexperience.

"Sure," she said heartily. "I counted 'em last night. I got seven."

"I got five and a great long skin," Betty competed hotly.

"Pooh," said Calista, "I've got a scratch longer than my hand is. Teacher said maybe I'd get an infect," she added importantly.

Then we kept on neutral ground, such as blank-books and Fourth of July and planning to go bare-foot some day, until Calista attacked a pickled peach which she had brought.

"Our whole cellar's full of pickled peaches," I incautiously observed. "I could have brought some if I'd thought."

"We got more than that," said Delia, instantly. "We got a thousand glasses of jelly left over from last year."

"A thousand!" repeated Margaret Amelia, in derision. "A hundred, you mean."

"Well," Delia said, "it's a lot. And jars and jars and jars of preserves. And cans and cans and *cans*. . . ."

The others took it up. Why we should have boasted of the quantity of fruit in our parents' cellars, I have no notion, save that it was for the unidentified reason which impels all boasting. When I am in a very new bit of country, where generalizations and multiplications follow every fact, I am sometimes reminded of the fashion of our talk whose statements tried to exceed themselves, in a kind of pyrotechnic pattern bursting at last into nothing and the night. We might have been praising climate or crops or real estate.

Mary Elizabeth spoke with something like eagerness.

"We got a bottle of blackberry cordial my grandmother made before she died," she said. "We keep it in the top bureau drawer."

"What a funny place to keep it . . ." Delia began, and stopped of her own accord.

I remember that everybody was willing enough to let Mary Elizabeth help pick up the dishes. Then she took a tree for Pussy-wants-a-corner, which always follows the picnic

part of a picnic. But hardly anyone would change trees with her, and by the design which masks as chance, everyone ran to another tree. At last she casually climbed her tree, agile as a cat, a feat which Delia alone was shabby enough to pretend not to see.

We started homeward when the red was flaming up in the west and falling deep in the heart of the river. By then Mary Elizabeth was almost at ease with us, but rather, I think, because of the soft evening, and perhaps in spite of our presence.

"Oh!" she cried. "Somebody grabbed the sun and pulled it down. I saw it go!"

Delia looked shocked. "You oughtn't to tell such things," she reproved her.

Mary Elizabeth flung up the arm with the torn sleeve and ran beside us, laughing with abandon. We were all running down the slope in the red light.

"We're Indians, looking for roots for the medicine-man," Delia called; "Yellow Thunder is sick. So is Red Bird. We're hunting roots."

She was ahead and we were following. We caught at the dead mullein stalks and milkweed pods and threw them away, and leaped up

and pulled at the low branches with their tender buds. We were filled with the flow of the Spring and seeking to express it, as in the old barbaric days, by means of destruction. . . . At the foot of the slope a little maple tree was growing, tentative as a sunbeam and scarcely thicker, left by the Spring that had last been that way. When she reached it, Delia laid hold on it, and had it out by its slight root, and tossed it on the moss.

"W-h-e-e-e!" cried Delia, "I wish it was Arbour Day to-morrow too!"

Mary Elizabeth stopped laughing. "I turn here," she said. "It's the short cut. Good-bye — I had a grand time. The best time I ever had."

Delia pretended not to hear. She said nothing. The others called casual good-byes over shoulder. Going home, they rebuked me soundly for having invited Mary Elizabeth. Delia rehearsed the array of reasons. If she came to school, we would have to *know* her, she wound up. I remember feeling baffled and without argument. All that they said was true, and yet —

"I'm going to see her," I announced stoutly,

more, I dare say, because I was tired and a little cross than from real loyalty.

"You'll catch some disease," said Delia. "I know a girl that went to see some poor children and she caught the spinal appendicitis and died before she got back home."

We went round by the schoolhouse, drawn there by a curiosity that had in it inevitable elements of regret. There they were, little dead-looking trees, standing in places of wet earth, and most of them set somewhat slanting. Everyone was gone, and in the late light the grounds looked solemn and different.

"Just think," said Delia, "when we grow up and the trees grow up, we can tell our children how we planted 'em."

"Why, we never —" Calista began.

"Our school did, didn't it?" Delia contended. "And our school's we, isn't it?"

But we overruled her. No, to the end of time, the trees that stood in those grounds would have been planted by other hands than ours. We were probably the only ones in the school who hadn't planted a tree. "I don't care, do you?" we demanded of one another, and reiterated our denial.

"I planted a-a-a- — Never-green!" Harold Rodman shouted, running to meet us.

"So did we!" we told him merrily, and separated, laughing. It had, it seemed, been a great day, in spite of Mary Elizabeth.

I went into the house, and hovered about the supper table. I perceived that I had missed hot waffles and honey, and these now held no charm. Grandmother Beers was talking.

"When I was eight years old," she said, "I planted it by the well. And when Thomas went back to England fifty years after, he couldn't reach both arms round the trunk. And there was a seat there — for travellers."

I looked at her, and thought of that giant tree. Would those dead-looking little sticks, then, grow like that?

"If fifty thousand school children each planted a tree to-day," said my mother, "that would be a forest. And planting a forest is next best to building a city."

"Better," said my father, "better. What kind of tree did you plant, daughter?" he inquired.

I hung my head. "I — we — there was a picnic," I said. "We didn't *have* to plant 'em. So we had a picnic."

My father looked at me in the way that I remember.

"That's it," he said. "For everyone who plants a tree, there are half a dozen that have a picnic. And two dozen that cut them down. At last we've got one in the family who belongs to the majority!"

When I could, I slipped out in the garden. It was darkening; the frogs in the Slough were chorussing, and down on the river-bank a catbird sang at intervals, was silent long enough to make you think that he had ceased, and then burst forth again. The town clock struck eight, as if eight were an ancient thing, full of dignity. Our kitchen clock answered briskly, as if eight were a proud and novel experience of its own. The 'bus rattled past for the Eight-twenty. And away down in the garden, I heard a step. Someone had come in the back gate and clicked the pail of stones that weighted its chain.

I thought that it would be one of the girls, who not infrequently chose this inobvious method of entrance. I ran toward her, and was amazed to find Mary Elizabeth kneeling quietly on the ground, as she had been when I came upon her at noon.

"What you doing?" I demanded, before I could see what she was doing.

"This," she said.

I stooped. And she had a little maple tree, for which she was hollowing a home with a rusty fire-shovel that she had brought with her.

"It's the one Delia Dart pulled out," she said. "I thought it'd be kind of nice to put it here. In your yard. You could bring the water, if you want."

I brought the water. Together we bent in the dusk, and we set out the little tree, near the back gate, close to my play-house.

"We'd ought to say a verse or something," I said vaguely.

"I can't think of any," Mary Elizabeth objected.

Neither could I, but you had to say something when you planted a tree. And a line was as good as a verse.

"'God is love' 's good enough," said Mary Elizabeth, stamping down the earth. Then we dismissed the event, and hung briefly above the back gate. Somehow, I was feeling a great and welcome sense of relief.

"It was kind o' nice to do that," I observed, with some embarrassment.

"No, it wasn't either," rejoined Mary Elizabeth, modestly.

We stood kicking at the gravel for a moment. Then she went away.

I faced about to the quiet garden. And suddenly, for no reason that I knew, I found myself skipping on the path, in the dark, just as if the day were only beginning.

V

THE KING'S TRUMPETER

And so it is for that night long ago when Mary Elizabeth and I stood by the tree and tried to think of something to say, that after all these years I have made the story of Peter.

Long years ago, when the world was just beginning to be, there was a kingdom which was not yet finished. Of course when a world has just stopped being nothing and is beginning to be something, it takes a great while to set all the kingdoms going. And this one wasn't done.

For example, in the palace garden where little Peter used to play, the strangest things were to be met. For the mineral kingdom was just beginning to be vegetable, and the vegetable was just beginning to be animal, and the animal was just beginning to be man, — and man was just, just beginning to know about his living

spirit. Do you see what *that* means? While you looked at a mound of earth it became a bush — or a very little time afterward, as time in these things is reckoned. While you looked at a beast-shaped bush — all bushes at night are shaped like beasts — it became a living animal — or, again, a *very* little afterward. And men had by no means got over being apes, tigers, swine, and dogs, and sometimes you hardly knew which a man was, a real man or one of these animals. And spirits were growing in men as fast as this might be. Everything, you see, lay in savage angles and wild lines.

Little Peter was playing one morning in the palace garden, and such playing as it was! He would be moulding little balls of loam and fashioning them with seeds, when suddenly they would break into life as buds and then as flowers, almost as one now sees twigs of wood break into life, or as quiet cocoons become living butterflies — for the world is not so different. Or Peter would be playing with a spongy-looking mass on a rock in the brook, when it would break from its rock and go gayly swimming about, and be a fish-thing. Or he would push at a bit of ooze with a cat-tail, and a little

flying life would mount abruptly and wing away. It was exciting playing in those days, and some of the things you can do in these days. Only then it was all new, so Peter could see just how wonderful it was.

Now, that morning the king was walking in his palace garden. And he was troubled, for everywhere that he looked there were loose ends and rough edges, and shapeless things waiting to be fashioned, and it was so all over his kingdom. There was such a great lot to do that he could not possibly do it all alone — no king, however industrious, could have done it all. And he longed for the help of all his subjects. So when the king came on little Peter, busily making living things where none had been before, he was mightily pleased, and he sat down with the little lad on a grassy platform in the midst of the garden.

"Lo, now, little lad," said the king, "what do you play ?"

Instead of playing at keeping store or keeping house or at acting or hunting or exploring, little Peter was playing another game.

"I'm playing it's creation, your majesty," he answered, "and I'm playing help the king."

"Lo, now," said the king, "I would that all my subjects would play as well as you."

The king thought for a moment, looking out on all the savage angles and wild lines, while little Peter watched a bit of leaf mould becoming a green plant.

"Summon me my hundred heralds!" the king suddenly bade his servants.

So the servants summoned the hundred heralds, who hurried into their blue velvet and silver buckles and came marching, twenty abreast, across the grassy plateau, where the morning sun made patterns like wings, and among the wings they bowed themselves and asked the king his will.

"Hundred heralds," said the king, "be it only that you do this willingly, I would that you go out into my kingdom, into its highways and even to its loneliest outposts, and take my people my message. Cry to them, until each one hears with his heart as well as his head: 'The world is beginning. You must go and help the king.'"

Now, little Peter, when he heard the message, rose and stood beside the king, and in his breast something thrilled and trembled like a smitten chord. But as for the hundred heralds, they

were troubled as one man — though he not yet wholly a man.

"O king," they said, twenty at a time, "blue velvet and silver buckles are meet for the streets of cities and to call men to feasting and to honour the king. But as for the highways and the loneliest outposts — that is another matter."

"But what of the message?" the king asked sadly, and this none of the heralds knew how to answer; and presently the king sent them away, for he would never have unwilling service in his palace or in his kingdom. And as they went, little Peter looked after them, and he saw, and the king saw, that for all their blue velvet and silver buckles, the hundred heralds, marching away twenty abreast, were not yet all men, but partly they were apes in manner and swine at heart. And little Peter wondered if he fashioned them as he did his bits of mould, whether they would burst from a sheath, *all* men, as burst his little plants.

"Summon me my thousand trumpeters!" the king bade his servants next.

The thousand trumpeters hurried into their purple velvet and their lace collars and seized their silver trumpets, and came marching fifty

abreast across the grassy plateau, where the noon sun made a blinding light, like the light of another sun; and they bowed themselves in the brightness and asked the king his will.

But when the king had told them his will and had repeated the message and asked them if they could go willingly, the thousand trumpeters were troubled as one man — and he not yet wholly a man.

"O king," said they, in fifties and one hundreds, "lo, now, these silver trumpets. These are meet to sound up and down the streets of cities and to call men to feasting and to honour the king, and never are they meet to sound in the lonely outposts. Pray thee, O king, keep us near thee."

"But what of the message?" the king asked, and none of his trumpeters could help him there, and he would have no unwilling service in his palace or in his kingdom, so he sent them all away. And as they went, little Peter looked after them, and he saw, and the king saw, that for all their purple velvet and lace collars, the thousand trumpeters, marching away fifty abreast, were not all men, but they were apes in manner and swine and hounds at heart. And

little Peter almost wished that he could fashion them as he did his bits of mould and see if they would not change into something better.

So then the king called a meeting of his High Council, and his councillors hurried into their robes of state and appeared on the grassy plateau when the evening was lighting the place to be a glory.

"Lo, now," said the king, "I needs must send a message to all my people. Let us devise or dream some way to take it."

When they heard the message, the councillors nodded, with their hands over their mouths, looking at the ground.

Then the king said — there, in the beginning of the world: —

"I have a thought about a wire which shall reach round the earth and oversea and undersea, on which a man may send a message. And a thought I have about a wire which shall stretch across the land, and upon that wire a voice may travel alone. And a thought about messages that shall pierce the air with no wire and no voice. But none of these things is now."

("Nay," said the council, murmuring among themselves, "or ever shall be.")

" — and if they were," said the king, "I would have one serve me even better than these, to reach the head and the heart of my people. How shall I do this thing? For I must have help in finishing my kingdom."

The council, stepping about in the slanting light, disputed the matter, group by group, but there lay nowhere, it seemed, a conclusion.

"You yourselves," the king cried at last, "who know well that the kingdom must be completed, you yourselves gather the people in multitudes together and tell them the message."

But at this the High Council twitched their robes of state and would have none of it.

"Who would sit in the high places if we did *that?*" said they.

So the king sent them all away, and little Peter, standing beside the king, looked after them. And he saw, and the king saw, how, under their robes of state, the High Council had not entirely stopped being ape and swine and hound and tiger and, early in the world as it was, still there seemed no great excuse for that.

"Oh, sire," said little Peter, "I wish I could play with them as I play with my bits of mould

and loam and could turn them into something better and alive."

"Well said, little Peter," replied the king, smiling sadly.

And now the west, which had been like a vast, stained-glass window, streaming with warm light, fell into gray opaqueness, and the grassy plateau became a place of shadows in which night things were born gently. And the king looked away to the beast-shaped bushes and to all the striving land.

"Oh, my kingdom, my kingdom!" he cried, grieving. "Now, would that this little Peter here could help you in the making."

And then little Peter stood upright in the faint light.

"May it please the king," he said softly, "I will take the message to his people."

The king stared down at him.

"You?" he said. "*You*, little man? And how, pray, would you take my message?"

"May it please the king," said little Peter, "I would tell everyone in the kingdom till all should have been told."

"Little man," said the king, "you are no bigger than a trumpet."

"Ay," said the little lad, "I think that is what I am. I would that I be not Peter, but Trumpeter. So send me forth."

At this the king laughed, and for the laughter his heart was the lighter. He touched the boy's brow.

"See, then, I touch your brow, little Trumpeter," he said. "Go forth — and do you know my message?"

"You had first touched my heart, your majesty," said the little boy, "and the message is there."

You would think, perhaps, that Peter would have waited till the morning, but he would not wait an hour. He made a little packet of linen and of food, and just as the folk within the palace were beginning their evening revelry, he stepped out on the highway and fared forth under the moon.

But fancy walking on such a highway as that! At first glance it looked like any other night road, stretching between mysterious green. But not anything there could be depended upon to stay as it was. A hillock, lying a little way ahead, became, as he reached it, a plumy shrub, trembling with amazement at its trans-

formation from dead earth to living green. At a turn in the road, a low bush suddenly walked away into the wood, a four-footed animal. Everything changed as he looked at it, as if nothing were meant to be merely what it was. The world was beginning!

At the foot of a hill, where the shadows were thick, Peter met the first one to whom he could give his message. The man was twisted and ragged and a beggar, and he peered down in Peter's face horribly.

"Sir," said Peter, courteously, "the world is beginning. You must go and help the king."

"Help the king!" cried the beggar, and his voice was uneven, like a bark or a whine that was turning into words. "I can't help the king without my supper."

"Supper is only supper," said little Peter, who had never in his life been hungry. "One must help the king — that is more."

The beggar struck the ground with his staff.

"I'm hungry," he said like a bark. "I want some supper and some dinner and all the way back to breakfast before I help the king, world or no world!"

And suddenly little Peter understood what it

is to be hungry, and that, if folk were hungry, they must first find means of feeding themselves before they could listen. So he gave the beggar all that he had of food in his packet, which was the least that he could do, and sent him on his way, charging him with the message.

At the top of the hill, Peter came on another man, sitting under a sycamore tree. The man was a youth, and very beautiful, and he was making a little song, which went like this:—

"Open, world, your trembling petals slowly,
Here one, there one, natal to its hour,
Toward the time when, holden in a vessel holy,
You shall be a flower."

Though Peter did not know what the song might mean, yet it fell sweetly upon the night, and he liked to listen. And when it was done, he went and stood before the youth.

"Sir," he said, "the world is beginning. You must go and help the king."

"I know, I know, little lad," said the youth, and his voice was clear, like bird-notes that were turning into words. "I, too, tell the message, making it in a song."

And these words made Peter glad, so that his

strength was new, and he ran on with the poet's gentle music in his ears.

I cannot tell you how far Peter went, but he went very far, and to many a lonely outpost, and away and away on a drear frontier. It was long to go and hard to do, but that is the way the world is made; and little Peter went on, now weary, now frightened, now blithe, now in good company, now alone and in the dark. I cannot tell you all the adventures he had and all the things he did — perhaps you will know these in some other way, sometime. And there were those to whom he told the message who listened, or set out in haste for the king's palace; and some promised that they would go another day, and a few ran to tell others. But many and many were like the hundred heralds and the thousand trumpeters and the king's High Council, and found many a reason why they might not set out. And some there were who mocked Peter, saying that the world indeed was doing very well without their help and would work itself out if only one would wait; and others would not even listen to the little lad.

At last, one morning when the whole world seemed glad that it was beginning and seemed to

long to tell about it, little Peter entered a city, decorated for a festival. Everywhere were garlands of vines and of roses, bright rugs and fluttering pennons and gilded things, as if the world had been long enough begun so that already there were time to take holidays. The people were flooding the streets and crowding the windows, and through their holiday dress Peter could see how some minced and mocked a little like apes, and others peered about like giraffes, and others ravened for food and joy, like the beggar or the bear or the tiger, and others kept the best, like swine, or skulked like curs, or plodded like horses, or prattled like parrots. Animals ran about, dumb like the vegetables they had eaten. Vegetables were heaped in the stalls, mysterious as the earth which they had lately been. The buildings were piled up to resemble the hills from whose substance they had been created, and their pillars were fashioned like trees. Everywhere were the savage angles and wild lines of one thing turning into another. And Peter longed to help to fashion them all, as he fashioned his little balls of mould and loam.

"There is so much yet to do," thought little

Peter, "I wonder that they take so much time for holidays."

So he ran quickly to a high, white place in the midst of the town, where they were making ready to erect the throne of the king of the carnival, and on that he stood and cried: —

"Hear me — hear me! The world is beginning. You must go and help the king."

Now, if those about the carnival throne had only said: "What is that to us? Go away!" Peter would have been warned. But they only nodded, and they said kindly: "Yes, so it is — and we mean to help presently. Come and help us first!" And one of the revellers, seeing Peter, how little he was, picked him up and held him at arm's length and cried: —

"Lo, now, this little lad. He is no bigger than a trumpet . . ."

(That was what the king had said, and it pleased Peter to hear it said again.)

". . . Let us take him," the revellers went on, "and *have* him for a trumpet. And take him with us in our great procession. What think ye?"

"And may I cry out what message I please?" little Peter asked eagerly.

"Surely," answered all the revellers, gayly. "What is that to us, so that you come with us?"

They picked him up and tossed him on their shoulders — for he was of about a brazen trumpet's weight, no more; — and Peter clapped his hands for joy, for he was a boy and he loved to think that he would be a part of that gorgeous procession. And they took him away to the great tent on the city green where everyone was dressing for the carnival.

Peter never had seen anything so strange and wonderful as what was within that tent. In it everything and everybody had just been or was just going to be something or somebody else. Not only had the gay garments piled on the floor just been sheep's and silkworm's coats, not only had the colours laid upon them just been roots and stems and herb-leaves, not only had the staves been tree's boughs and elephant's tusks, but the very coal burning in the braziers and the oil in the torches had once been sunshine, and the very flames had been air, and before that water, and so on. But, most of all, the people showed what they had been, for in any merry-making the kinds of animals in folk can*not* be covered up; and it was a regular menagerie.

They took little Peter and dressed him like a trumpet. They thrust both his legs into one long cloth-of-gold stocking, and he held his arms tightly at his sides while they wound his little body in ruffles of gold-coloured silk, growing broader and broader into a full-gathered ruff from which his laughing face peeped out. And he was so slender and graceful that you could hardly have told him from a real, true, golden trumpet.

Then the procession was ready to start, all lined up in the great tent. And the heralds and the music all burst out at once as the green curtain of the tent was drawn aside, and the long, glittering line began to move. Little heralds, darting about for all the world like squirrels and chipmunks; a great elephant of a master of ceremonies, bellowing out the order of the day as if he had been presiding over the jungle; a group of men high in the town's confidence, whose spots proclaimed them once to have been leopards, and other things; long, lithe harlequins descended from serpents; little, fat clowns still showing the magpie; prominent citizens, unable as yet to conceal the fox and the wolf in their faces; the mayor of the town, revealing

the chameleon in his blood; little donkey men; and a fine old gentleman or two made like eagles — all of them getting done into men as quickly as possible. In the midst rode the king of the carnival, who had evidently not long since been a lion, and that no doubt was why they picked him out. He rode on a golden car from which sprays of green sprang out to reach from side to side of the broad street. And at his lips, held like a trumpet, he carried little Peter, one hand on Peter's feet set to the kingly lips, and the other stretched out to Peter's breast.

Then Peter lifted up his shrill little voice and shouted loud his message: —

"*The world is beginning! The world is beginning! The world is beginning! You must go and help the king. You must go-o-o and help the king!*"

But just as he cried that, the carnival band struck into a merry march, and all the heralds were calling, and the people were shouting, and Peter's little voice did not reach very far.

"Shout again!" bade the king of the carnival, who did not care in the least what Peter said, so long only as he acted like a trumpet.

So Peter shouted again — shouted his very

best. He shouted as loudly as he did at play, as loudly as when he swam and raced in the water, as loudly as any boy could shout. But it seemed to him that his voice carried hardly farther than the little chipmunk-and-squirrel heralds before him, and that nobody heard him.

Still, it was all such fun! The glitter of the procession, the eagerness of the people, the lilt and rhythm of the music. And fun over all was it to be carried by the carnival king himself, high above everyone and dressed like a golden trumpet. Surely, surely no boy ever had more fun than that! Surely, surely it was no great marvel that after a little time, so loud was the clamour and so fast the excitement, that Peter stopped crying his message, and merely watched and laughed and delighted with the rest.

Up and down through the thronged streets they went, that great, glittering procession, winding its mile or more of spangles and gilding and gay dress and animals richly caparisoned. Everywhere the crowded walks and windows and balconies sent cheers into the air, everywhere flowers were thrown and messages tossed and melody flooded. And wherever that long line passed, everyone noted the king's trumpet and

pointed it out and clapped hands and tried to throw upon it garlands. And there was so much to see, and so much excitement there was in the hour, that at last little Peter did not even think of his message, and only jested and made merry. For it was the most wonderful game that ever he had played.

"How now, my little trumpeter?" the king of the carnival would say sometimes, when he rested his arms and held Peter at his side.

"Oh, *well*, your majesty!" Peter would cry, laughing up at him.

"This is all a fine game and nothing more," the king of the carnival would tell him. "Is this not so?"

Then he would toss the boy on high again, away above the golden car, and Peter would cry out with the delight of it. And though there were no wings and no great brightness in the air, yet the hour was golden and joy was abroad like a person.

Presently, a band of mountebanks, dressed like ploughmen and harvesters, came tumbling and racing by the procession, and calling to everyone to come to a corn husking on the city green.

"Husks! Husks! A corn husking on the city green. Husks — husks — husks!" they cried.

But there was such a tumult that no one could well hear what they said, and presently they appealed to the carnival king to tell the people.

"Nay, O king, they hear us not for the noise of thy passing," said they. "Prithee tell the people what we would say."

"Tell the people, my little trumpeter!" cried the king, and lifted Peter to his lips.

And Peter shouted out with all his might. "Husks! Husks! A corn husking on the city green. Husks — husks — husks!"

"Bravely done!" called the mountebanks, in delight, and ran alongside the car, leaping and tumbling and grotesquely showing their delight. "Bravely done! Tell the people — bid the people come!"

So Peter called again, and yet again, at the full strength of his little voice. And it seemed to him that the people surely listened, and it was a delight and a flattery to be the one voice in the great procession, save only the music's voice.

At last, for one moment it chanced that the

bands ceased altogether their playing, so that there was an instant of almost silence.

"*Husks, husks, husks!*" he cried, with all his might.

And as he did that, thin and clear through the silence, vexed somewhat by the voices of the people, — now barks, now whines, now bellows, now words, — Peter caught a little wandering melody, as though a bird's singing were turning into words: —

"*Open, world, your trembling petals slowly,*
Here one, there one, natal to its hour . . ."

and in the midst of that motley throng, Peter, looking down, saw the poet whom he had left on the hill-top, now wandering alone and singing his message to his lute.

"Oh, the king! Oh, *my* king!" cried little Peter, as if he had had a great wound.

"What now, my little trumpeter?" asked the carnival king.

"Not you — *not* you!" cried Peter. "Oh, set me down, — set me down. Oh, what have I done?"

"How *now*, little Trumpet?" cried the carnival king. But Peter, instead of stretching

out his little body, slim and trumpet-graceful, turned and fell at the king's feet in the car and slipped from his grasp and scrambled through the branching green and reached the street.

There, in the wonder and then the mockery of the people, he began struggling to free himself from the ruffles of cloth-of-gold about his body. Some laughed, some ran from him as if he were mad, and some, wishing for themselves the golden ruffles, helped him to pull them off and to strip down the clinging golden stocking that bound his limbs. And then, being close to the city gates, little Peter ran, all naked as he was, without the gates and on to the empty road. And he ran sobbing out his heart : —

"Oh, my king ! I would have told them that the world is beginning — but, instead I have told them only to get them husks !"

Now the poet, who had seen it all — and who understood — ceased his song and made his way as quickly as might be for the press of the people, and ran after Peter, and fared along the road beside him, trying to comfort him. But the little lad might not be comforted, and he only cried out again : —

"The king — the king! I would have given them his message — and I bade them only to get them husks!"

So the poet — who understood — said no word at all, but he shielded Peter with his mantle; and then he took his lute and walked beside the little lad, singing.

They had gone but a short distance when they reached the top of a hill, where the sun shone with exceeding brightness, and the poet noted that the light fell almost like little wings. Peter saw none of this, for his hands were still covering his face. But he heard the poet's singing interrupted by a voice. The voice was uneven — like a bark or a whine that is turning into words — but yet its words were clear and unmistakable. And they were: —

"*Sirs, the world is beginning. You must go and help the king.*"

Peter looked up and he saw the man who had spoken, a man twisted and ragged, but who smiled down into the little boy's face so gently that, for a moment, Peter did not know him; and then he recognized that beggar to whom, on that night long ago, he had given food and the message.

"Ay, friend!" the poet was answering him ringingly, "and we go!"

The beggar hurried on, and the poet touched Peter's hand.

"Nay, now, little Peter," he said, "grieve not your heart too much. For you it was who told the beggar the message — from the top of the hill I heard — and I saw you give him food. Can you tell any man without some good coming true of the tidings? Then it may well be that there are those in the town to whom you told the king's message who will remember, too. Go we forth together to try again!"

Peter looked down the long highway, stretching between the mysterious green, where shrubs changed to animals in so little a space; and then he looked away to the king's kingdom and saw how it was not finished — because the world had just stopped being nothing and was beginning to be something — and he looked back towards the city where, as at the court, men had not yet done being animals. Everything was changing, as if nothing were meant to be merely what it is. And everything was in savage angles and wild lines. The world was beginning. The people *must* be told to go and help the king.

"Go we forth together to try again," the poet repeated.

He touched his lute, and its melody slipped into the sunshine.

"*Toward the time when, holden in a vessel holy,*
You shall be a flower."

Then Peter stretched out his arms, and his whole slender little body became like one trumpet voice, and that voice strong and clear to reach round the world itself.

"I try once again!" he answered. "The world is beginning. *I must go and help the king.*"

VI

MY LADY OF THE APPLE TREE

Our lawn was nine apple trees large. There were none in front, where only Evergreens grew, and two silver Lombardy poplars, heaven-tall. The apple trees began with the Cooking-apple tree by the side porch. This was, of course, no true tree except in apple-blossom time, and at other times hardly counted. The length of twenty jumping ropes — they call them skipping ropes now, but we never called them so — laid one after another along the path would have brought one to the second tree, the Eating-apple tree, whose fruit was red without and pink-white within. To this day I do not know what kind of apples those were, whether Duchess, Gilliflower, Russet, Sweet, or Snow. But after all, these only name the body of the apple, as Jasper or Edith names the body of you. The soul of you, like the real sense of Apple, lives nameless all its days. Sometime we must play

the game of giving us a secret name — the Path-finder, the Lamplighter, the Starseeker, and so on. But colours and flavours are harder to name and must wait longer than we.

. . . Under this Nameless tree, then, the swing hung, and to sit in the swing and have one's head touch apple-blossoms, and mind, not touch them with one's foot, was precisely like having one's swing knotted to the sky, so that one might rise in rhythm, head and toe, up among the living stars. I can think of no difference worth the mentioning, so high it seemed. And if one does not know what rhythm is, one has only to say it over: Spring, Summer, apple-blossom, apple; new moon, old moon, running river, echo — and then one will know.

"I would pick some," said Mother, looking up at the apple-blossoms, "if I only knew which ones will never be apples."

So some of the blossoms would never be apples! Which ones? *And why?*

"Why will some be apples and some others never be apples?" I inquired.

But Mother was singing and swinging me, and she did not tell.

"Why will you be apples and you not be

apples, and me not know which, and you not know which?" I said to the apple-blossoms when next my head touched them. Of course, you never really speak to things with your throat voice, but you think it at them with your head voice. Perhaps that is the way they answer, and that is why one does not always hear what they say. . . .

The apple-blossoms did not say anything that I could hear. The stillness of things never ceased to surprise me. It would have been far less wonderful to me if the apple-blossoms and the Lombardy poplars and my new shoes had answered me sometimes than that they always kept their unfriendly silence. One's new shoes *look* so friendly, with their winking button eyes and their placid noses! And yet they act as cross about answering as do some little boys who move into the neighbourhood.

. . . Indeed, if one comes to think of it, one's shoes are rather like the sturdy little boys among one's clothes. One's slippers are more like little girls, all straps and bows and tiptoes. Then one's aprons must be the babies, long and white and dainty. And one's frocks and suits — that is to say, one's *new* frocks and

suits — are the ladies and gentlemen, important and elegant; and one's everyday things are the men and women, neither important nor elegant, but best of all; and one's oldest garments are the witches, shapeless and sad and haunted. This leaves ribbons and sashes and beads to be fairies — both good and bad.

The silence of the Nameless tree was to lift a little that very day. When Mother had gone in the house, — something seemed always to be pulling at Mother to be back in the house as, in the house, something always pulled at me to be back out-of-doors, — I remember that I was twisting the rope and then lying back over the board, head down, for the untwisting. And while my head was whirling and my feet were guiding, I looked up at the tree and saw it as I had never seen it before: soft falling skirts of white with lacy edges and flowery patterns, drooping and billowing all about a pedestal, which was the tree trunk, and up-tapering at the top like a waist — why, the tree was a lady! Leaning in the air there above the branches, surely I could see her beautiful shoulders and her white arms, her calm face and her bright hair against the blue. She had

risen out of the trunk at the tree's blossoming and was waiting for someone to greet her.

I struggled out of the swing and scrambled, breathless, back from the tree and looked where she should be. Already I knew her. Nearly, I knew the things that she would say to me — sometimes now I know the things that she would have said if we had not been interrupted.

The interruption came from four girls who lived, as I thought, outside my world, — for those were the little days when I did not yet know that this cannot be. They were the Eversley sisters, in full-skirted, figured calico, and they all had large, chapped hands and wide teeth and stout shoes. For a year they had been wont to pass our house on the way to the public school, but they had spoken to me no more than if I had been invisible — until the day when I had first entered school. After that, it was as if I had been born into their air, or thrown in the same cage, or had somehow become one of them. And I was in terror of them.

"Come 'ere once!" they commanded, their voices falling like sharp pebbles about the Apple-blossom lady and me.

Obediently I ran to the front fence, though my throat felt sick when I saw them coming. "Have an apple core? Give us some of them flowers. Shut your eyes so's you'll look just like you was dead." These were the things that they always said. Something kept telling me that I ought not to tell them about my lady, but I was always wanting to win their approval and to let them know that I was really more one of them than they thought. So I disobeyed, and I told them. Mysteriously, breathlessly I led them back to the tree; and feeling all the time that I was not keeping faith, I pointed her out to them. I showed them just where to look, beginning with the skirts, which surely anybody could see. . . . I used often to dream that a crowd of apish, impish little folk was making fun of me, and that afternoon I lived it, standing out alone against those four who fell to instant jeering. If they had stooped and put their hands on their knees and hopped about making faces, it would have been no more horrible to me than their laughter. It held for me all the sense of bad dreams, and then of waking alone, in the middle of the night. The worst was that I could find no words to make them know. I

could only keep saying, "She is there, she is there, she is there." By some means I managed not to cry, not even when they each broke a great branch of blossoms from the Eating-apple tree and ran away, flat-footed, down the path; not indeed until the gate had slammed and I turned back to the tree and saw that my lady had gone.

There was no doubt about it. Here were no longer soft skirts, but only flowery branches where the sunlight thickened and the bees drowsed. My lady was gone. Try as I might, I could not bring her back. So she had been mocking me too! Otherwise, why had she let me see her so that I should be laughed at, and then herself vanished? Yet, even then, I remember that I did not doubt her, or for a moment cease to believe that she was really there; only I felt a kind of shame that I could see her, and that the others could not see her. I had felt the same kind of shame before, never when I was alone, but always when I was with people. We played together well enough, — Pom, pom, pullaway, Minny-minny motion, Crack-the-whip, London Bridge, and the rest, save that I could not run as fast as nearly everybody. But

the minute we stopped playing and *talked*, then I was always saying something so that the same kind of shame came over me.

I saw Delia crossing the street. In one hand she held two cookies which she was biting down sandwich-wise, and in the other hand two cookies, as yet unbitten. The latter she shook at me.

"I knew I'd see you," she called resentfully. "I says I'd give 'em to you if I saw you, and if I didn't see you —"

She left it unfinished at a point which gave no doubt as to whose cookies they might have been had I not been offensively about. But the cookies were fresh, and I felt no false delicacy. However, after deliberation, I ate my own, one at a time, rejecting the sandwich method.

"It lasts them longest," I explained.

"The other way they bite thicker," Delia contended.

"Your teeth don't taste," I objected scientifically.

Delia opened her eyes. "Why, they do too!" she cried.

I considered. I had always had great respect for the strange chorus of my teeth, and I was

perfectly ready to regard them as having independent powers.

"Oh, not when you eat tipsy-toes like that," said Delia, scornfully. "Lemme show you. . . ." She leaned for my cooky, her own being gone. I ran shamelessly down the path toward the swing, and by the time the swing was reached I had frankly abandoned serial bites.

I sat on the grass, giving Delia the swing as a peace-offering. She took it, as a matter of course, and did not scruple to press her advantage.

"Don't you want to swing me?" she said.

I particularly disliked being asked in that way to do things. Grown-ups were always doing it, and what could be more absurd: "Don't you want to pick up your things now?" "Don't you want to let auntie have that chair?" "Don't you want to take this over to Mrs. Rodman?" The form of the query always struck me as quite shameless. I truthfully shook my head.

"I'm company," Delia intimated.

"When you're over to my house, I have to let you swing because you're company," I said speculatively, "and when I'm over to your

house, I have to let you swing because it's your swing."

"I don't care about being company," said Delia, loftily, and started home.

"I'll swing you. I was only fooling!" I said, scrambling up.

It worked — as Delia knew it would and always did work. All the same, as I pushed Delia, with my eyes on the blue-check gingham strap buttoned across the back of her apron, I reflected on the truth and its parallels: How, when Delia came to see me, I had to "pick up" the playthings and set in order store or ship or den or cave or county fair or whatnot because Delia had to go home early; and when I was over to Delia's, I had to help put things away because they were hers and she had got them out.

Low-swing, high-swing, now-I'm-going-to-run-under-swing — I gave them all to Delia and sank on the grass to watch the old cat die. As it died, Delia suddenly twisted the rope and then dropped back and lay across the board and loosed her hands. I never dared "let go," as we said, but Delia did and lay whirling, her hair falling out like a sun's rays, and her eyes shut.

I watched her, fascinated. If she opened her eyes, I knew how the picket fence would swim for her, no longer a line but a circle. Then I remembered what I had seen in the tree when I was twisting, and I looked back. . . .

There she was! Quite as I had fleetingly seen her, with lacy skirts and vague, sweeping sleeves and bending line of shoulder, my Lady of the Tree was there again. I looked at her breathlessly, unsurprised at the gracious movement of her, so skilfully concealed by the disguises of the wind. Oh, was she there all the time, or only in apple-blossom time? Would she be there not only in white Spring but in green Summer and yellow Fall — why, perhaps all those times came only because she changed her gown. Perhaps night came only because she put on something dusky, made of veils. Maybe the stars that I had thought looked to be caught in the branches were the jewels in her hair. And the wind might be her voice! I listened with all my might. What if she should tell me her name . . . and know my name! . . .

"Seventeen un-twists," announced Delia. "Did you ever get that many out of such a little stingy swing as you gave me?"

I did not question the desirability of telling Delia. The four Eversley girls had been barbarians (so I thought). Delia I had known always. To be sure, she had sometimes failed me, but these times were not real. My eyes were on the tree, and Delia came curiously toward me.

"Bird?" she whispered.

I shook my head and beckoned her. Still looking at my lady, I drew Delia down beside me, brought her head close to mine.

"Look," I said, "her skirt is all branches — and her face is turned the other way. See her?"

Delia looked faithfully. She scanned the tree long and impartially.

"See her? See her?" I insisted, under the impression that I was defining her. "It's a lady," I breathed it finally.

"Oh," said Delia, "you mean that side of the tree is the shape of one. Yes, it is — kind of. I'm going home. We got chocolate layer cake for supper. Good-bye. Last tag."

I turned to Delia for a second. When she went, I looked back for my lady — but she had gone. Only — now I did not try to bring her back. Neither did I doubt her, even then.

But there came back a certain loneliness that I had felt before, only never so much as now. Why was it that the others could not see?

I lay face downward in the grass under the tree. There were other things like this lady that I had been conscious of, which nobody else seemed to care about. Sometimes I had tried to tell. More often I had instinctively kept still. Now slowly I thought that I understood: I was different. Different from the whole world. Did I not remember how, when I walked on the street, groups of children would sometimes whisper: "There she is — there she is!" Or, "Here she comes!" I had thought, poor child, that this would be because my hair was long, like little Eva's in the only play that most of us had seen. But now I thought I knew what they had known and I had not known: That I was different.

I dropped my face in the crook of my arm and cried — silently, because to cry aloud seemed always to have about it a kind of nakedness; but I cried sorely, pantingly, with aching throat, and tried to think it out.

What was this difference? I had heard them say in the house that my head was large, my

hair too long to let me be healthy; and the four Eversleys always wanted me to shut my eyes so that I should look dead. But it was something other than these. Maybe — I shall never forget the grip of that fear — maybe I was not human. Maybe I was Adopted. I had no clear idea what Adopted meant, but my impression was that it meant not to have been born at all. That was it. I was like the apple-blossoms that would never be apples. I was just a Pretend little girl, a kind of secret one, somebody who could never, never be the same as the rest.

I turned from that deep afternoon and ran for the wood-pile where I had a hiding-place. Down the path I met Mother and clung to her.

"Mother, Mother!" I sobbed. "Am I adopted?"

"No, dear," she said seriously. "You are mine. What is it?"

"Promise me I'm not!" I begged.

"I promise," she said. "Who has been talking to you? You little lamb, come in the house," she added. "You're tired out, playing."

I went with her. But the moment had entered me. I was not like the rest. I said it over, and every time it hurt. There is no

more passionate believer in democracy than a child.

Across the street Delia was sitting on the gate-post, ostentatiously eating chocolate layer cake, and with her free hand twisting into a curl the end of her short braid. Between us there seemed to have revealed itself a gulf, life-wide. Had Delia always known about me? Did the Rodman girls know? And Calista? The four Eversleys must know — this was why they laughed so. . . . But I remember how, most of all, I hoped that Mary Elizabeth did not know — yet.

From that day I faced the truth: I was different. I was somehow not really-truly. And it seemed to me that nothing could ever be done about it.

VII

THE PRINCESS ROMANCIA

THAT night I could not go to sleep with the knowledge. If only I, as I am now, might have sat on the edge of the bed and told a story to me as I was then! I am always wishing that we two might have known each other — I as I am now and I as I was then. We should have been so much more interested in each other than anybody else could ever be. I can picture us looking curiously at each other through the dark, and each would have wished to be the other — how hard we would have wished that. But neither of us would have got it, as sometimes happens with wishes.

Looking back on that night, and knowing how much I wanted to be like the rest, I think this would be the story that I, as I am now, would have told that Little Me.

Once upon a time to the fairy king and queen

there was born a little daughter. And the king, being a modern fairy, determined to invite to the christening of his daughter twelve mortals — a thing never before countenanced in fairy ceremony. And of course all unreal people are always very particular about their ceremonies being *just* so.

It was a delicate and difficult task to make out that mortal invitation list, for it was very hard to find in the world twelve human beings who, at a fairy party, would exactly fit in. After long thought and consultation with all his ministers and councillors, the king made out the following list: —

A child; a poet; a scientist; a carpenter; a prophet; an artist; an artisan; a gardener; a philosopher; a woman who was also a mother; a man who was also a father; and a day labourer.

"Do you think that will do *at all?*" the fairy king asked the fairy queen, tossing over the list.

"Well, dear," she replied, "it's probably the best you can do. You know what people are." She hesitated a mere breath — a fairy's breath — and added: "I do wonder a little, though, just *why* the day labourer."

"My dear," said the king, "some day you will understand that, and many other things as well."

The christening room was a Vasty Hall, whose deep blue ceiling was as high as the sky and as strange as night. Lamps, dim as the stars, hung very high, and there was one silver central chandelier, globed like the moon, and there were frescoes like clouds. The furnishings of the Vasty Hall were most magnificent. There were pillars like trees spreading out into capitals of intricate and leafy design. Lengths of fair carpet ran here and there, as soft and shining as little streams; there were thick rugs as deep as moss, seats of native carved stone, and tapestries as splendid as vistas curtaining the distance. And the music was like the music of All-night, all done at once.

To honour the occasion the fairy guests had all come dressed as something else — for by now, of course, the fairies are copying many human fashions. One was disguised as a Butterfly with her own wings prettily painted. One represented a Rose, and she could hardly be distinguished from an American Beauty. One was made up as a Light, whom nobody could rec-

ognize. One was a White Moth and one was a Thistle-down, and there were several fantastic toilettes, such as a great Tulle Bow, a Paper Doll, and an Hour-glass. As for the Human Beings present, they all came masked as themselves, as usual; and their names I cannot give you, though sometimes I see someone with dreaming eyes whom I think may possibly have been one of those twelve — for of course it must have made a difference in their looks ever afterward. It was a very brilliant assemblage indeed, and everyone was most intangible and elusive, which are fairy terms for well-behaved.

While the guests were waiting for the fairy baby princess to be brought in, they idled about, with that delightful going-to-be-ice-cream feeling which you have at any party in some form or another, only you must *never* say so, and they exchanged the usual pleasant nothing-at-alls. It is curious how very like human nothings fairy nothings are.

For example: —

"There is a great deal of night about," said the Butterfly Fairy with a little shiver. "If I were a truly butterfly, I should never be able to find my way home."

"And there is such a fad for thunder-and-lightning this season," added the Paper Doll Fairy, agreeably.

"Do you remember," asked the White Moth Fairy, "the night that we all dressed as white moths and went to meet the moon? We flew until we were all in the moonlight, and then we knew that we had met her. I wonder why more people do not meet the moon-rise?"

"That reminds me," said the Thistle-down Fairy, "of the day we all made up as snowflakes and went to find the Spring. Don't you know how she surprised us, in the hollow of the low-land? And what a good talk we had? I wonder why more people do not go to meet the Spring?"

"A charming idea!" cried the Rose Fairy to the Light Fairy, and the Light Fairy shone softly upon her, precisely like an answer.

Then somebody observed that the wind that night was a pure soprano, and the guests amused themselves comparing wind-notes; how on some nights the wind is deep bass, like a man's voice, raging through the world; and sometimes it is tenor, sweet, and singing only serenades; and sometimes it is all contralto and like a lullaby;

and sometimes, but not often, it is like harp music played on the trees.

Suddenly the whole dark lifted, like a garment; and moonlight flooded the Vasty Hall. And as if they had filtered down the air with the light, the fairy christening party entered — not as we enter a room, by thresholds and steps, but the way that a thought comes in your head and you don't know how it got there.

The christening party wore robes of colours that lie deep between the colours and may hardly be named. And, in a secret ceremony, such as attends the blooming of flowers, the fairy baby was christened Romancia. Then the fairies brought her many offerings; and these having been received and admired, a great hush fell on the whole assembly, for now the twelve Human Beings came forward with their gifts. And everyone, except, indeed, the princess herself, was wild with curiosity to see what they had brought.

No one left a card with any gift, but when the fairy king came to look them over afterward, he felt certain who had brought each one. The gifts were these: A little embroidered gown which should make everyone love the princess

while she wore it; a gazing crystal which would enable the princess to see one hundred times as much as anybody else saw; certain sea secrets and sea spells; a lyre which played itself; a flask containing a draught which should keep the princess young; a vial of colours which hardly anyone ever sees; flowers and grasses and leaves which could be used almost like a dictionary to spell out other things; an assortment of wonderful happy fancies of every variety; a new rainbow; a box of picture cards of the world, every one of which should come true if one only went far enough; and a tapestry of the universe, wrapped around a brand-new idea in a box.

When these things had been graciously accepted by the king, there was a stir in the company, and sweeping into its midst came another Human Being, one who thought that she had every right to be invited to the christening, but who had not been invited. All the fairies shrank back, for it was an extraordinary-looking Human Being. She was tall and lithe and wore a sparkling gown, and her face had the look of many cities, and now it was like the painted cover of an empty box, and all the time it had the meaning only of those who never look

at the stars, or walk in gardens, or think about others rather than themselves, or listen to hear what it is right for them to do. This kind of Human Being is one who not often has any good gift to give to anyone, and this the fairies knew.

The Vasty Hall became very quiet to see what she had brought, for no one understood what she could possibly have to bestow upon a baby. And without asking leave of the king or the queen, she bent over the child and clasped on her wrist the tiniest bracelet that was ever made in the world, and she snapped its lock as fast as the lock on a fetter, and held up the tiniest key that ever was wrought.

"The princess," she cried, "shall seem *different from everyone else*. She shall seem like nobody who is or ever has been. As long as she wears her bracelet, this shall be true; and that she may never lose it, I shall hold her bracelet's key. Hail to this little princess child, who shall seem like nobody in the world!"

Now, no one present was quite certain what this might mean, but the lady's robe was so beautifully embroidered and sparkling, and her voice was such a thing of loops and curves, that nearly everyone accepted the gift as something

fine after all, and the queen gave her her hand to kiss. But the king, who was a very wise fairy, said nothing at all, and merely bowed and eyed the bracelet, in deep thought.

His meditation was interrupted by a most awkward incident. In the excitement of the bestowal of gifts by the Human Beings, and in the confusion of the entrance of the thirteenth and uninvited Human Being, one of them all had been forgotten and had got himself shuffled well at the back of everyone. And now he came pressing forward in great embarrassment, to bring his gift. It was the day labourer, and several of the Human Beings drew hastily back as he approached the dais. But everyone fell still farther back in consternation when it was seen what he had brought. For on the delicate cobweb coverlet of the little princess's bed, he cast a spadeful of earth.

"It's all I've got," the man said, "or I'd brought a better."

The earth all but covered the little bed of the princess, and it was necessary to lift her from it, which the fairy queen did with her own hands, flashing a reproachful glance at her husband, the king. But when the party had

trooped away for the dancing, — with the orchestra playing the way a Summer night would sound if it were to steep itself in music, so that it could only be heard and not seen, — then the king came quietly back to the christening chamber and ordered the spadeful of earth to be gathered up and put in a certain part of the palace garden.

And so (the Human Beings having gone home at once and forgotten that they had been present), when the music lessened to silence and the fairies stole from note to note and at last drifted away as invisibly as the hours leave a dial, they passed, in the palace garden, a great corner of the rich black earth which the day labourer had brought to the princess. And it was ready for seed sowing.

The Princess Romancia grew with the days and the years, and from the first it was easily to be seen that certainly she seemed different from everyone in the world. As a baby she began talking in her cradle without having been taught — not very plainly, to be sure, or so that anybody in particular excepting the fairy queen understood her — but still she talked. As a little girl she seemed always to be listening

to things as if she understood them as well as she did people, or better. When she grew older, nobody knew quite how she differed, but everybody agreed that she seemed different. And this the princess knew better than anybody, and most of the time it made her hurt all over.

When the fairies played at thistle-down ball, the princess often played too, but she never felt really like one of them all. She felt that they were obliged to have her play with them because she was the princess, and not because they wanted her. When they played at hide-and-go-seek in a flower bed, somehow the others always hid together in the big flowers, and the princess hid alone in a tulip or a poppy. And whenever they whispered among themselves, she always fancied that they were whispering of her. She imagined herself often looked at with a smile or a shrug; she began to believe that she was not wanted but only endured because she was the princess, and she was certain that no one liked her for herself alone, because she was somehow so different. Little by little she grew silent, and refused to join in the games, and sat apart alone. Presently she began to give blunt answers and to take exception and even to dis-

LITTLE BY LITTLE SHE GREW SILENT AND REFUSED TO JOIN IN THE GAMES.

agree. And, of course, little by little the court began secretly to dislike her, and to cease to try to understand her, and they told one another that she was hopelessly different and that that was all that there was to be said about her.

But in spite of all this, the Princess Romancia was very beautiful, and the fame of her beauty went over the whole of fairyland. When enough years had gone by, fairy princes from this and that dominion began to come to the king's palace to see her. But though they all admired the princess's great beauty, many were of course repelled by her sharp answers and her constant suspicions.

But at last the news of the princess's beauty and strangeness reached the farthest border of fairyland and came to the ears of the young Prince Hesperus. Now Prince Hesperus, who was the darling of his father's court and beloved of everybody, was tired of everybody. "Every fairy is like every other fairy," he was often heard saying wearily. "I do wish I could find somebody with a few new ways. One would think fairies were all cut from one pattern!" Therefore, when word came to him of the strange and beautiful Princess Romancia, who was believed

to be different from everyone else in the world, you can imagine with what haste he made ready and set out for her father's place.

Prince Hesperus arrived at the palace at twilight, when the king's garden was wrapped in that shadow light which no one can step through, *if he looks*, without feeling somewhat like a fairy himself and glad to be one. He sent his servants on ahead, folded his wings, and proceeded on foot through the silent gardens. And in a little arbour made of fallen petals, renewed each day, he came on the Princess Romancia, asleep. He, of course, did not recognize her, but never, since for him the world began, had the prince seen anyone so beautiful.

His step roused her and she sprang to her feet. And as soon as he looked at her, Prince Hesperus found himself wanting to tell her of what he had just been thinking, and before he knew it he was doing so.

"I have just been thinking," he said, "what a delightful pet a leaf-shadow would make, if one could catch it and tame it. I wonder if one could do it? Think how it would dance for one, all day long."

The Princess Romancia stared a little.

"But when the sun went down," she was surprised into saying, "the shadow would be dead."

"Not at all," the prince replied, "it would only be asleep. And it would never have to be fed, and it could live in one's palace."

"I would like such a pet," said the princess, thoughtfully.

"If I may walk with you," said the prince, "we will talk more about it."

They walked together toward the palace and talked more about it, so that the Princess Romancia quite forgot to be more different than she was, and the prince forgot all about everything save his companion. And he saw about her all the gifts of tenderness and vision and magic, of sea secrets and sea spells, of music and colours and knowledge and charming notions which the Human Beings had brought her at her birth, though these hardly ever were visible *because* the princess seemed so different from everybody else. And when, as they drew near the palace, their servants came hastening to escort them, the two looked at each other in the greatest surprise to find that they were prince and princess. For all other things had seemed so much more important.

Their formal meeting took place that evening in the Vasty Hall, where, years before, the princess had been christened. Prince Hesperus was filled with the most joyous anticipation and awaited his presentation to the princess with the feeling that fairyland was just beginning. But the princess, on the other hand, was no sooner back in the palace among her ladies than the curse of her terrible christening present descended upon her as she had never felt it before. How, the poor princess thought, could the prince possibly like her, who was so different from everybody in the world? While she was being dressed, every time that her ladies spoke in a low tone, she imagined that they were speaking of her; every time that one smiled and shook her head, the princess was certain that it was in pity of her. She fancied that they knew that her walk was awkward, her voice harsh, her robe in bad taste, and an old fear came upon her that the palace mirrors had all been changed to conceal from her that she was really very ugly. In short, by the time that she was expected to descend, poor Princess Romancia had made herself utterly miserable.

Therefore, when, in her gown of fresh cobweb,

the princess entered the hall and the prince hastened eagerly forward, she hardly looked at him. And when, at the banquet that followed, he sat beside her and tried to continue their talk of the arbour and the walk, she barely replied at all.

"How beautiful you are," he murmured.

"So is the night," said the princess, "and you do not tell the night that it is beautiful."

"Your eyes are like stars," the prince said.

"There are real stars above," said the princess.

"You are like no one else!" cried the prince.

"At least you need not charge me with that," said the poor princess.

Nor would she dance with him or with anyone else. For she imagined that they did not wish to dance with her, and that her dancing was worse than anyone's. And as soon as she was able, and long before cock-crow, she slipped away from them all and went to sleep in a handy crocus cup.

Now at all this the king and queen were nearly as distressed as the prince, and they were obliged to tell Prince Hesperus the whole story of the christening. When he heard about the

uninvited Human Being who had given the baby princess this dreadful present and had kept the key to the bracelet which was its bond, he sprang up and grasped his tiny sword.

"I will go out in the world and find this Human Being," he cried, "and I will bring back the bracelet key."

Without again seeing the princess, Prince Hesperus left the palace and fared forth on his quest. And when she found that he was gone, she was more wretched than ever before. For in her life no one had ever talked to her as he had talked, speaking his inmost fancies, and when she had lost him, she wanted more than ever to talk with him. But the king, who was a very wise fairy, did not tell her where the prince had gone.

And now the Princess Romancia did not know what to do with herself. The court was unbearable; all her trivial occupations bored her; and the whole world seemed to have been made different from all other worlds. Worst to endure was the presence of her companions, who all seemed to love and to understand one another, while she only was alone and out of their sympathy.

"Oh," she cried, "if only I had a game or a task to do with somebody or something that didn't know I am different — that wouldn't know who I am!"

And she thought longingly of the prince's fancy about the leaf-shadow for a pet which should dance with one all day long.

"A leaf-shadow would not know that I am not like everybody else!" the poor princess thought.

One night, when a fairy ring had been formed in an open grassy space among old oaks, the princess could bear it all no longer. When the music was at its merriest and a band of strolling goblin musicians were playing their maddest, she slipped away and returned to the palace by an unfrequented path and entered a long-disused part of the garden. And there, in a corner where she had never before walked, she came on a great place of rich, black earth, which, in the sweet Spring air, lay ready for the sowing. It was the spadeful of earth which the day labourer had brought to her christening; and there, for all these years, the king had caused it to remain untouched, its own rank weed growth enriching its richness, until but a touch would now

turn it to fruitage. And seeing it so, and being filled with her wish for something which should take her thought away from herself and from her difference from all the world, the Princess Romancia was instantly minded to make a garden.

Night being the work time and play time of the fairies, the princess went at once to the palace granaries and selected seeds of many kinds, flower and vegetable and fern seeds, and she brought them to this corner of rich earth, and there she planted them, under the moon. She would call no servants to help her, fearing lest they would smile among themselves at her strange doing. All night she worked at the planting, and when morning came, she fell asleep in a mandrake blossom, and woke hungry for a breakfast of honeydew and thinking of nothing save getting back to her new gardening.

The Wind helped her, and as the days passed, the Sun and the Rain helped her, and she used certain magic which she knew, so that presently her garden was a glory. Poppies and corn, beans and berries, green peas and sweet peas, pinks and potatoes, celery and white phlox, melons and cardinal flowers — all these grew wonderfully together, as it were, hand in hand,

as they will grow for fairy folk, and in such great luxuriance that the princess wrought early and late to keep them ordered and watered. She would have no servants to help her, for she grew more and more to love her task. For here at last in her garden she had found those whom she could not imagine to be smiling among themselves at anything that she said or did; but all the green things responded to her hands like friends answering to a hand clasp, and when the flowers nodded to one another, this meant only that a company of little leaf-shadows were set dancing on the earth, almost as if they had been tamed to be her pets, according to the prince's fancy.

Up at the palace the queen and the ladies-in-waiting to the queen and the princess regarded all this as but another sign of poor Romancia's strangeness. From her tower window the queen peered anxiously down at her daughter toiling away at sunrise.

"Now she is raising carrots and beets," cried the queen, wringing her hands. "She grows more different from us every moment of her life!"

"She seems to do so," admitted the king;

but he was very wise; and, "Let her be," he commanded everybody. "We may see what this all means, and a great many other things as well."

Meanwhile Prince Hesperus, journeying from land to land and from height to valley, was seeking in vain for the one person who, as he thought, could remove from the princess the curse of her difference from all the rest of the world. And it was very strange how love had changed him; for now, instead of his silly complaint that every fairy is like every other fairy, and his silly longing for a different pattern in fairies, he sought only for the charm which should make his beloved princess like everybody else. Where should he find this terrible Human Being, this uninvited one who held the key to the princess's bracelet that was so like a fetter?

He went first to the town nearest to fairyland. The people of the town, having no idea how near to fairyland they really were, were going prosaically about their occupations, and though they could have looked up into the magic garden itself, they remained serenely indifferent. There he found the very mother who had been at the christening of the princess; and alighting close

to a great task that she was doing for the whole world, he tried to ask her who it was who makes folk different from all the rest. But she could not hear his tiny, tiny voice which came to her merely as a thought about something which could not possibly be true. In a pleasant valley he came on that one who, at the christening, had brought the lyre which played of itself, but when the prince asked him his question, he fancied it to be merely the wandering of his own melody, with a note about something new to his thought. The poet by the stream singing of the brotherhood of man, the prophet on a mountain foreseeing the brotherhood as in a gazing crystal, the scientist weaving the brotherhood in a tapestry of the universe — none of these knew anyone who can possibly make folk different from everybody else, nor did any of the others on whom Prince Hesperus chanced.

When one day he thought that he had found her, because he met one whose face had the look of many cities and was like the painted cover of an empty box, straightway he saw another and another and still others, men and women both, who were like her, with only the meaning of those who never look at the stars, or walk in

gardens, or think about others rather than themselves, or listen to hear what is right for them to do. And then he saw that these are many and many, who believe themselves to be different from everybody else and who try to make others so, and he saw that it would be useless to look further among them for that one who had the key for which he sought.

So at last Prince Hesperus turned sadly back toward the palace of the princess.

"Alas," said the prince, "it is for her own happiness that I seek to have her like other people. For myself I would love her anyway. But yet, what am I to do — for she seems so different that she will never believe that I love her!"

It was already late at night when the prince found himself in the neighbourhood of the palace, and being tired and travel-worn, he resolved to take shelter in the cup of some flower and wait until the palace revelries were done. Accordingly he entered the garden of an humble cottage and crept within the petals of a wild lily growing in the long, untended grass.

He had hardly settled himself to sleep when he heard from the cottage the sound of bitter

crying. Now this is a sound which no fairy will ever pass by or ever so much as hear about without trying to comfort, and at once Prince Hesperus rose and flew to the sill of an open lattice.

He looked in on a poor room, with the meanest furnishings. On a comfortless bed lay the father of the house, ill and helpless. His wife sat by his side, and the children clung about her, crying with hunger and mingling their tears with her own. The man turned and looked at her, making a motion to speak, and Prince Hesperus flew into the room and alighted on the handle of a great spade, covered with earth, which stood in a corner.

"Wife," the man said, "I've brought you little but sorrow and hunger. I would have brought you more if I had had better. And now I see you starve."

"I am not *too* hungry," the wife said — but the children sobbed.

Prince Hesperus waited not a moment. He flew into the night and away toward the palace, and missing the fairy ring where among old oaks the fairies were dancing, he reached the palace by an unfrequented path and entered a

disused part of the palace garden. And there, in a corner which he had never visited, Prince Hesperus saw a marvellous mass of bloom and fruit — poppies and corn, beans and berries, green peas and sweet peas, pinks and potatoes, celery and white phlox, melons and cardinal flowers — all growing wonderfully together, as it were, hand in hand. And above them, in a moon-flower clinging to the wall, sat the Princess Romancia, rocking in the wind and brooding upon her garden.

"Come!" cried Prince Hesperus. "There is a thing to do!"

The princess looked at him a little fearfully, but he paid almost no attention to her, so absorbed he was in what he wished to have done.

"Hard by is a family," said the prince, "dying of hunger. Here is food. Hale in these idlers dancing in the light of the moon, and let us carry the family the means to stay alive."

Without a word the princess went with him, and they appeared together in the fairy ring and haled away the dancers. And when these understood the need, they all joined together, fairies, goblin musicians and all, and hurried away to the garden of the princess.

They wove a litter of sweet stems and into this they piled all the food of the princess's tending. And when the queen would have had them send to the palace kitchen for supplies, the king, who was a wise fairy, would not permit it and commanded that all should be done as the prince wished. So when the garden was ravaged of its sweets, they all bore them away, and trooped to the cottage, and cast them on the threshold. And then they perched about the room, or hovered in the path of the moonlight to hear what should be said. And Prince Hesperus and Princess Romancia listened together upon the handle of the poor man's spade.

At sight of the gifts the wife sprang up joyfully and cried out to her husband, and the children wakened with happy shouts.

"Here is food — food!" they cried. "Oh, it must be from the fairies."

The sick man looked and smiled.

"Ay," he said, "the Little Folk have remembered us. They have brought us rich store in return for my poor spadeful of earth."

Then the prince and princess and all the court understood that this poor man whom they had helped was that very day labourer who had

come to the christening of the princess. And swift as a moonbeam — and not unlike one — Prince Hesperus darted from beside the princess and alighted on the man's pillow.

"Ah," he cried, "can you not, then, tell me who it is who has the power to make one different from everybody else in the world?"

In half delirium the day labourer heard the voice of the prince and caught the question. But he did not know that it was the voice of the prince, and he fancied it to be the voice of the whole world, as it were throbbing with the prince's question. And he cried out loudly in answer: —

"No one has that power! No one is different! Those who seem different hold no truth. We are all alike, all of us that live!"

Swiftly the prince turned to the king and the queen and the court.

"The uninvited Human Being," he cried, "did she say that the princess should *be* different from all the world, or that she should merely *seem* different?"

The queen and the court could not remember, but the king, who was a wise fairy, instantly remembered.

"She said that she should *seem* different," he said.

Then the prince laughed out joyfully.

"Ay," he cried, "seem different, indeed! There are many and many who may do that. But this man speaks truth and out of his spadeful of earth we have learned it, "*We are all alike, all of us who live!*"

With that he grasped his tiny sword and flew to the side of the princess and lifted her hand in his. And with a swift, deft stroke he cut from her wrist the bracelet that was like a fetter, and he took her in his arms.

"Ah, my princess," he cried. "You have seemed different from us all only because you would have it so!"

The Princess Romancia looked round on the court, and suddenly she saw only the friendliness which had always been there if she could have believed. She looked on her father and mother, the king and the queen, and she saw only tenderness. She looked on the day labourer and his family and understood that, fairy and princess though she was, she was like them and they were like her. Last, she looked in the face of the prince — and she did not look away.

Invisibly, as the hours leave a dial, the fairies drifted from the little room and back to the fairy ring among the old oaks to dance for very joyousness. The labourer and his family, hearing them go, were conscious of a faint lifting of the dark, as if morning were coming, bringing a new day. And to the Princess Romancia, beside Prince Hesperus, the world itself was a new world, where she did not walk alone as she had thought, but where all folk who will have it so walk together.

VIII

TWO FOR THE SHOW

First of all there was Every Day, with breakfast, lunch, outdoors, dinner, and evenings.

Then there were Sundays, which were quite another kind of time, as different as layer cake from sponge cake: With breakfast late, and mustn't-jump-rope, and the living-room somehow different, the Out-of-doors moved farther off, our play-house not waiting for us but acting busy at something else in which we had no part; the swing hanging useless as it did when we were away from home and thought about it in the night; bells ringing as if it were *their* day; until we were almost homesick to hear the grocer's cart rattle behind the white horse.

There were school half holidays when the sun shone as it never shone before, and we could not decide how to spend the time, and to look ahead seemed a glorious year before dark.

There were the real holidays — Christmas

and the Fourth and Birthdays, which didn't seem like days of time at all, but were like fairies of time, not living in any clock.

And Company-time, when we were not to go in certain rooms, or sing in the hall, and when all downstairs seemed unable to romp with us.

And Vacation-time, when 9 o'clock and 1 o'clock and 4 o'clock meant nothing, and the face of the clock never warned or threatened and the hands never dragged, and Saturday no longer stood out but sank into insignificance, and the days ran like sands.

All these times there were when life grew different and either let us in farther than ever before or else left us out altogether. But almost the strangest and best of these was house-cleaning time.

Screens out, so that the windows looked like faces and not like masks! The couch under the Cooking-apple tree! We used to lie on the couch and look up in the boughs and wish that they would leave it there forever. What was the rule that made them take it in? Mattresses in the backyard to jump on and lie on and stare up from, so differently, into the blue. Rugs like rooms, opening out into an adjoining pansy

bed. Chairs set about on the grass, as if at last people had come to understand, as we had always understood, that the Outdoors is a real place to be in, and not just a place to pass through to get somewhere else. If only, if only some day they had brought the piano out on the lawn! To have done one's practising out there, just as if a piano were born, not made! But they never did that, and we were thankful enough for the things that they did do. When Saturday came, I found with relief that they had still the parlour and one bedroom left to do. I had been afraid that by then these would be restored to the usual dry and dustless order.

In the open window of the empty sitting-room I was sitting negligently that morning, when I saw Mr. Britt going by. He was as old as anyone I knew in the world — Mr. Britt must have been fifty. I never thought of him as *folks* at all. There were the other neighbours, all dark-haired and quick and busy at the usual human errands; and then there was Mr. Britt, leaving his fruit trees and his rose bushes to go down to his office in the Court House. He had white hair, a long square white beard, and he carried a stick with a crook in the handle. I

watched him pityingly. His life was all done, as tidy as a sewed seam, as sure as a learned lesson. All lived out, a piece at a time, just as I planned mine. How immeasurably long it had taken him; what a slow business it must have seemed to him; how very old he was!

At our gate he stopped. Mr. Britt's face was pink, and there were pleasant wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and when he talked, he seemed to think about you.

"Moving?" he inquired.

"House-cleaning," I explained with importance.

"Fine day of it," he commented and went on. He always sighed a little when he spoke, not in sorrow; but in a certain weariness.

In forty-two years I should be as old as that. Forty-two years — more than five life-times, as I knew them.

I was still looking after him, trying to think it through — a number as vast as the sky of stars was vast — when round the corner, across the street, the Rodman girls appeared. ("Margaret and Betty Rodman?" my mother used to inquire pointedly when I said "the Rodman girls.") In their wake was their little brother, Harold. I hailed them joyously.

"Come on over! It's house-cleaning."

"We were," admitted Betty, as they ran. "We saw the things out in the yard, and we asked right off. We can stay a whole hour."

"Can't we get Mary Gilbraith to tell us when it's an hour?" Margaret Amelia suggested as they came in at the gate. "Then we won't have to remember."

Mary Gilbraith stood beating a curtain, and we called to her. She nodded her head, wound in a brown veil.

"Sure," she said. "And don't you children track up them clean floors inside there."

I glanced over my shoulder into the empty room.

"Shall I get down," I inquired of my guests, "or will you get up?"

They would get up, and they did so. We three just fitted the sill, with Harold looking wistfully upward.

"Go find a nice stick," Margaret Amelia advised him maternally.

"What'll we play?" I was pursuing politely. "Pretend?" I intimated. Because of course there is nothing that is quite so much fun as

pretend. "Or real?" I conceded the alternative its second place.

"Pretend what?" Betty wanted to know.

"Well, what difference does that make?" I inquired scornfully. "We can decide that after."

However, we duly weighed the respective merits of Lost-in-the-Woods, Cave-in-the Middle-of-the-World, and Invisible, a selection always involving ceremony.

"Harold can't play any of them," Margaret Amelia remembered regretfully. "He don't stay lost nor invisible — he wriggles. And Cave scares him."

We considered what to do with Harold, and at last mine was the inspiration — no doubt because I was on the home field. In a fence corner I had a play-house, roofed level with the fence top. From my sand-pile (sand boxes came later — mine was a corner of the garden sacred to me) we brought tin pails of earth which we emptied about the little boy, gradually covering his fat legs and nicely packing his plaid skirt. Then we got him a baking-powder can cover for a cutter and a handleless spoon, and we went away. He was infinitely content.

"Makin' a meat pie," he confided, as we left him.

Free, we were drawn irresistibly back to the out-of-doors furniture. We jumped in the middle of the mattresses lying in the grass, we hung the comforters and quilts in long overlapping rows on the clothes line and ran from one end to the other within that tent-like enclosure. Margaret Amelia arranged herself languidly on the Brussels couch that ordinarily stood in the upstairs hall piled with leather-bound reports, but now, scales falling from our eyes, we saw to be the bank of a stream whereon Maid Marian reclined; but while Betty and I were trying to decide which should be Robin Hood and which Alan-a-dale (alas, for our chivalry . . . we were both holding out to be Robin) Maid Marian settled it by dancing down the stair carpet which made a hallway half across the lawn. We followed her. The terminus brought us back to the parlour window. We stepped on the coping and stared inside. This was our parlour! Yet it looked no more like the formal room which we seldom entered than a fairy looks like a mortal. Many and many a time an empty room is so much more a

suggestive, haunted, beckoning place than ever it becomes after its furniture gets it into bondage. Rooms are often free, beautiful creatures before they are saddled and bridled with alien lives and with upholstery, and hitched for lumbering, permanent uses. I felt this vaguely even then.

"It's like the cloth in the store," I observed, balancing on my stomach on the sill. "It's heaps prettier before it's made up into clothes."

"How funny," said Margaret Amelia. "I like the trimming on, and the pretty buttons."

"Let's play," I said hurriedly; for I had seen in her eyes that look which always comes into eyes whose owners have just called an idea "funny."

"Very well. But," said Betty, frankly, "I'm awful sick of playing Pretend. You always want to play that. We played that last time anyhow. Let's play Store. Let's play," she said, with sudden zest, "Furniture Store, outdoors."

The whole lawn became the ground floor for our shop. Forthwith we arranged the aisles of chairs, stopping to sit in this one and that "to taste the difference." To sit in the patent

upholstered rocker, close to the flowering currant bush fragrant with spicy, yellow buds was like being somewhere else.

"This looks like the pictures of greenhouses," said Margaret Amelia, dragging a willow chair to the Bridal Wreath at the fork in the brick walk. She idled there for a moment.

"Emily Broom says that when they moved she rode right through town on their velvet lounge on the dray," she volunteered.

We pictured it mutely. Something like that had been a dream of mine. Now and then, I had walked backward on the street to watch a furniture wagon delivering a new chair that rocked idle and unoccupied in the box. I always marvelled at the unimaginativeness of the driver which kept him on the wagon seat.

"We've never moved," I confessed regretfully.

"We did," said Betty, "but they piled everything up so good there wasn't anything left to sit on. I rode with the driver — but his seat wasn't very high," she added, less in the interest of truth than with a lingering resentment.

"Stitchy Branchett told me," contributed Margaret Amelia, "once he set on the top step of the step ladder on one of their dray loads."

"I don't believe it," I announced flatly. "It'd tip and pitch him off."

"He *said* he did," Margaret Amelia held. "Betty heard him. Didn't he, Betty? Who I don't believe is Joe Richmond. He says he went to sleep on a mattress on the dray when they moved. He couldn't of."

"Course he couldn't of," we all affirmed.

"Delia says they've moved six times that she can remember of and she's rode on every load," I repeated.

We all looked enviously across at Delia's house. Then, moved by a common impulse, we scrambled back to make the most of our own advantages, such as they were.

At last the ground floor of the furniture store was all arranged, and the two show windows set with the choicest pieces to face the street. And when we were ready to open the place to the general public, we sat on the edge of the well curb and surveyed our results.

"Now let's start," said Margaret Amelia.

At that instant — the precision with which these things happen is almost conscious — Mary Gilbraith briefly put her head out the kitchen window.

"It's just edgin' on 'leven," she announced. "You children keep your feet off them mattresses."

We stared at one another. This was incredible. Margaret Amelia and Betty had just come. We had hardly tasted what the morning might have held. Our place of business was only at this moment ready for us. We had just meant to begin.

There was no appeal. We went down the garden path for Harold. He sat where we had left him, somewhat drowsy in the warm sun, patting an enormous mound of moist earth. Busy with our own wrongs, we picked him up and stood him on his feet without warning him. An indignant roar broke from him.

"Just goin' frost my meat pie!" he wailed. "Wiv chocolate on!"

Some stirring of pity for our common plight may have animated us — I do not remember. But he was hurried off. I went with them to the fence, gave them last tag as became an hostess, stood on the gate as it swung shut, experienced the fine jar and bang of its closing, and then hung wistfully across it, looking for the unknown.

The elm and maple shadows moved pleasantly on the cream-coloured brick walk whose depths of tone were more uneven than the shadows. An oriole was calling, hanging back downward from a little bough. Somebody's dog came by, looked up at me, wagged his tail, and hurried on about his business. Looking after him, I saw Mr. Britt coming slowly home with his mail. At our gate he stopped.

"Playing something?" he inquired.

Welcoming any sympathy, I told him how we had just got ready to play when it was time to stop. He nodded with some unexpected understanding, closing his eyes briefly.

"That's it," he said. "We all just get ready when it's time to stop. Fine day of it," he added, and sighed and went on.

I stared after him. Could it be possible that his life had not seemed long to him? That he felt as if he had hardly begun? I dismissed this as utterly improbable. Fifty years!

IX

NEXT DOOR

THE house next door had been vacant for two months when the New Family moved in. We had looked forward with excitement, not unmodified by unconscious aversion, to the arrival of the New Family.

"Have they any girls?" we had inquired when the To Rent sign had come down.

They had, it appeared, one girl. We saw her, with wavy hair worn "let down" in the morning, though we ourselves wore let-down hair only for occasions, pig-tails denoting mornings. She had on new soles — we saw them showing clean as she was setting her feet daintily; and when we, who were walking the fence between the two houses, crossed glances with her, we all looked instantly away, and though it was with regret that we saw her put into the 'bus next day to go, we afterward learned, to spend the Spring with her grandmother in a dry cli-

mate, we still felt a certain satisfaction that our social habits were not to be disquieted.

Nothing at all had been suspected of a New Boy. Into that experience I came without warning.

I was sitting on the flat roof of my play-house in the fence corner, laboriously writing on the weathered boards with a bit of a picket, which, as everybody knows, will make very clear brown letters, when the woodshed door of the house next door opened, and the New Boy came out. He came straight up to the fence and looked up at me, the sun shining in his eyes beneath the rimless plush cap which he was still wearing. He was younger than I, so I was not too afraid of him.

"What you got?" he inquired.

I showed him my writing material.

"I wrote on a window with a diamond ring a'ready," he submitted.

I had heard of this, but I had never wholly credited it and I said so. Besides, it would wear the ring out and who wanted to wear out a diamond ring to write on a window?

"It don't wear it out," the New Boy said. "It can keep right on writing forever and ever."

"Nothing can keep right on forever," I contended.

He cast about for an argument.

"Trees does," he produced it.

I glanced up at them. They certainly seemed to bear him out. I decided to abandon the controversy, and I switched with some abruptness to a subject not unconnected with trees, and about which I had often wondered.

"If you was dirt," I observed, "how could you decide to be into a potato when you could be into an apple just as well?"

The New Boy was plainly taken aback. Here he was, as I see now, doing his best to be friendly and to make conversation personal, to say nothing of his having condescended to parley with a girl at all, and I was rewarding him with an abstraction.

Said he: "Huh?"

"If you was dirt — " I began a little doubtfully, but still sticking to the text.

"I ain't dirt," denied the New Boy, with some heat.

"I says, if you *was* dirt —" I tried to tell him, in haste and some discomfort.

He climbed down from the fence on which he

had been socially contriving to stick, though his was the "plain" side.

"There ain't any girl," he observed with dignity, "going to call me dirt, nor call me if-I-was-dirt, either," and stalked back into the woodshed.

I looked after him in the utmost distress. I had been dealing in what I had considered the amenities, and it had come to this. Already the New Boy hated me.

I slipped to the ground and waited, watching through the cracks in the fence. Ages passed. At length I heard him call his dog and go whistling down the street. I climbed on the fence and sat looking over in the deserted garden.

Round the corner of the house next door somebody came. I saw a long, gray plaid shawl, with torn and flapping tassels, pinned about a small figure, with long legs. As she put her hand on the latch, she flashed me her smile, and it was Mary Elizabeth. She went immediately inside the shed door, and left me staring. What was she doing there? What unexpected places I was always seeing her. Why should she go in the woodshed of the New Family whom we didn't even know ourselves?

After due thought, I dropped to the other side of the fence, and proceeded to the woodshed door myself. It was unlatched, and as I peered in, I caught the sweet, moist smell of green wood, like the cool breath of the wood yard, where I had first seen her. When my eyes became used to the dimness, I perceived Mary Elizabeth standing at the end of a pile of wood, of the sort which we used to denominate "chunks," which are what folk now call fireplace logs, though they are not properly fireplace logs at all — only "chunks" for sitting-room stoves — and trying to look meet to new estates. They were evenly piled, and they presented a wonderful presence, much more human than a wall.

"See," said Mary Elizabeth, absorbedly, "every end of one is pictures. Here's a wheel with a wing on, and here's a griffin eating a lemon."

I stared over her shoulder, fascinated. There they were. And there were grapes and a chandelier and a crooked street. . . .

Some moments later we were aware that the kitchen door had opened, and that somebody was standing there. It was the woman of the

New Family, with a black veil wound round her head and the ends dangling. She shook a huge purple dust-cloth, and I do not seem to recall that there was anything else to her, save her face and veil and the cloth.

"Now then!" she said briskly, and in a tone of dreadful warning. "*Now* then!"

Mary Elizabeth turned in the utmost eagerness and contrition.

"Oh," she said, "I come to see about the work."

The New Family Woman towered at us from the top of the three steps.

"How much work," she inquired with majesty, "do you think I'd get out of you, young miss, at this rate?"

Mary Elizabeth drew nearer to her and stood before her, down in the chips, in the absurd shawl.

"If you'll leave me come," she said earnestly, "I'll promise not to see pictures. Well," she added conscientiously, "I'll promise not to stop to look at 'em."

How much weight this would have carried, I do not know; but at that moment the woman chanced to touch with her foot a mouse-trap that stood on the top step, and it "sprung" and

shed its cheese. In an instant Mary Elizabeth had deftly reset and restored it. This made an impression on the arbiter.

"You're kind of a handy little thing, I see," she said. "And of course you're *all* lazy, for that matter. And I do need somebody. Well, I've got a woman coming for to-day. You can begin in the morning. Dishes, vegetables, and general cleaning, and anything else I think you can do. Board and clothes only, mind you — and *them* only as long as you suit."

"Yes'm. No'm. Yes'm." Mary Elizabeth tried to agree right and left.

Outside I skipped in the sun.

"We're going to be next-yard neighbours," I cried, and that reminded me of the New Boy. I told her about him as we went round by the gate, there being no cross piece for a foothold on that side the fence.

"Oh," said Mary Elizabeth, "I know him. He's drove me home by my braids. He doesn't mean anything."

"Well," I said earnestly, "when you get a chance, you tell him that I wasn't calling him dirt. I says if he *was* dirt, how could he tell to be a potato or an apple."

Mary Elizabeth nodded. "Lots of boys pretend mad," she said philosophically, "to get you to run after them."

This was new to me. Could it be possible that you had to imagine folks, and what they really meant, as well as tending to all the other imagining?

"Can't you stay over?" I extended hospitality to Mary Elizabeth.

She could "stay over," it seemed, and without asking. This freedom of hers used to fill me with longing. To "stay over" without asking, to go down town, to eat unexpected offerings of food, to climb a new tree, as Mary Elizabeth could do, and all without asking! It was almost like being boys.

Now that Mary Elizabeth was to be a neighbour, a new footing was established. This I did not reason about, nor did I wonder why this footing might not be everybody's footing. We merely set to work on the accepted basis.

This comprised: Name, including middle name, if any, and for whom named; age, and birthday, and particulars about the recent or approaching birthday; brothers and sisters, together with their names, ages, and birthdays;

birthstones; grade; did we comb our own hair; voluntary information concerning tastes in flowers, colours, and food; and finally an examination and trying on of each other's rings. The stone had come out of Mary Elizabeth's ring, and she had found a clear pink pebble to insert in its place. She had, she said, grated the pebble on a brick to make it fit and she herself thought that it looked better than the one that she had lost, "but," she added modestly, "I s'pose it can't be."

Then came the revelation. To finish comparing notes we sat down together in my swing. And partly because, when I made a new friend, I was nervously eager to give her the best I had and at once, and partly because I was always wanting to see if somebody *would* understand, and chiefly because I never could learn wisdom, I looked up in the apple tree, now forsaken of all its pink, and fallen in a great green stillness, and I told her about my lady in the tree. I told her, expecting now no more than I had received from Delia and the Eversley girls. But Mary Elizabeth looked up and nodded.

"I know," she said. "I've seen lots of 'em. They's a lady in the willow out in our alley. I

see her when I empty the ashes and I pour 'em so's they won't blow on her."

I looked at her speechlessly. To this day I can remember how the little curls were caught up above Mary Elizabeth's ear that morning. Struck by my silence she turned and regarded me. I think I must have blushed and stammered like a boy.

"Can *you* see them too?" I asked. "In trees and places?"

"Why, yes," she said in surprise. "Can't everybody?"

Suddenly I was filled with a great sense of protection for Mary Elizabeth. I felt incalculably older. She had not yet found out, and I must never let her know, that everybody does not see all that there is to be seen in the world!

One at a time I brought out my treasures that morning and shared them with her, as treasures; and she brought out hers as matters of course. I remember that I told her about the Theys that lived in our house. They were very friendly and wistful. They never presumed or frightened one or came in the room when anyone was there. But the minute folk left the room — ah, then! They slipped out

"BUT THE MINUTE FOLK LEFT THE ROOM — AH THEN!"

from everywhere and did their living. I was always trying to catch them. I would leave a room innocently, and then whirl and fling it open in the hope of surprising them. But always They were too quick for me. In the times when the family was in the rooms and They were waiting for us to go, They used to watch us, still friendly and wistful, but also a little critical. Sometimes a whole task, or a mood, could be got through pleasantly because They were looking on.

Mary Elizabeth nodded. "They like our parlour best," she said. "They ain't any furniture in there. They don't come much in the kitchen."

It was the same at our house. They were always lurking in the curtained parlour, but the cheery, busy kitchen seldom knew them — except when one went out for a drink of water late at night. Then They barely escaped one.

How she understood! Delia I loved with all the loyalties, but I could not help remembering a brief conversation that I had once held with her.

"Do you have Theys at your house?" I had asked her, at the beginning of our acquaintance.

"Yes," she admitted readily. "Company all this week. From Oregon. They do their hairs on kids."

"I don't mean them," I explained. "I mean Theys, that live in between your rooms."

"We don't let mice get in *our* house," she replied loftily. "Only sometimes one gets in the woodshed. Do you use Choke-'em traps, or Catch-'em-alive traps and have the cat there?"

"Catch-them-alive-and-let-them-out-in-the-alley traps," I told her, and gave up hope, I remember, and went on grating more sugar-stone for the mud-pie icing.

Mary Elizabeth and I made mud pies that morning too, but all the time we made them we pretended. Not House-keep, or Store, or Bakery, or Church-sale—none of these pale pretendings to which I had chiefly been bound, save when I played alone. But now every pie and cake that we finished we two carried carefully and laid here and there, under raspberry bushes, in the crotch of the apple tree, on the wood-chopper's block.

"For Them to get afterwards," we said briefly. We did not explain — I do not think

that we could have explained. And we knew nothing of the old nights in the motherland when from cottage supper tables scraps of food were flung through open doors for One Waiting Without. But this business made an even more excellent thing of mud-pie baking, always a delectable pastime.

When the noon whistle was blowing up at the brick yard, a shadow darkened our pine board. It was the New Boy. One of his cheeks protruded extravagantly. Silently he held out to me a vast pink substance of rock-like hardness, impaled on a stick. Then, with an obvious effort, more spiritual than physical, he extracted from his pocket a third of the kind, for Mary Elizabeth, on whose presence he had not counted. We accepted gratefully, I in the full spirit of the offer. Three minutes later he and I were at our respective dinner tables, trying, I suppose, to discuss this surreptitious first course simultaneously with our soup; and Mary Elizabeth, on her way home, was blissfully partaking of her *hors d'œuvre*, unviolated by any soup.

"What are the new children like, I wonder?" said Somebody Grown. "I see there are two. I don't know a thing about the people, but we

can't call till the woman at least gets her curtains up."

I pondered this. "Why?" I ventured at last.

"Because she wouldn't want to see us," was the reply.

Were curtains, then, so important that one might neither call nor be called on without them? What other possible explanation could there be? Perhaps Mary Elizabeth's mother had no curtains and that was why our mothers did not know her.

"Mary Elizabeth is going to help do the work for the New Family, and live there," I said at last. "Won't it be nice to have her to play with?"

"You must be very kind to her," somebody said.

"*Kind to her!*" It was my first horrified look into the depths of the social condescensions. *Kind to her* — when I remembered what we shared! I thought of saying hotly that she was my best friend. But I was silent. There was, after all, no way to make anybody understand what had opened to me that morning.

X

WHAT'S PROPER

DELIA and Calista and Margaret Amelia and Betty Rodman I loved with devotion. And Mary Elizabeth I likewise loved with devotion. Therefore, the fact that my four friends would not, in the language of the wise and grown world, "receive" Mary Elizabeth was to me bitter and unbelievable.

This astounding situation, more than intimated on the day of the picnic, had its confirmation a few days after the advent of Mary Elizabeth in the New Family, when the six of us were seated on the edge of the board walk before our house. It was the middle of a June afternoon, a joyous, girlish day, with sun and wind in that feminine mood which is the frequent inheritance of all created things.

"I could 'most spread this day on my bread like honey, and eat it up, and not know the difference," said Mary Elizabeth, idly. "The queen's honey — the queen's honey — the

queen's honey," she repeated luxuriously, looking up into the leaves.

Delia leaned forward. It particularly annoyed her to have Mary Elizabeth in this mood.

"One, two, three, four, five of us," Delia said, deliberately omitting Mary Elizabeth as, for no reason, she counted us.

Mary Elizabeth, released from tasks for an hour or two before time to "help with the supper," gave no sign that she understood, save that delicate flush of hers which I knew.

"Yes," she assented lazily, "one, two, three, four, five of us — " and she so contrived that five was her own number, and no one could tell whom of us she had omitted.

"Let's play something," I hurriedly intervened. "Let's play Banquet."

Action might have proved the solvent, but I had made an ill-starred choice. For having selected the rectangle of lawn where the feast was to be spread, Mary Elizabeth promptly announced that she had never heard of a banquet for five people, and that we must have more.

"We've got six," corrected Delia, unwarily.

"Five," Mary Elizabeth persisted tranquilly,

"and it's not enough. We ought to have thirty."

"Where you going to get your thirty?" demanded the exasperated Delia.

"Why," said Mary Elizabeth, "*that's* always easy!" And told us.

The king would sit at the head, with his prime minister and a lord or two. At the foot would be the queen with her principal ladies-in-waiting (at *this* end, so as to leave room for their trains). In between would be the fool, the discoverer of the new land, the people from the other planets, us, and the animals.

"'The animals!'" burst out Delia. "Whoever heard of animals at the table?"

Oh, but it was the animals that the banquet was for. They were talking animals, and everyone was scrambling to entertain them, and every place in which they ate they changed their shapes and their skins.

"I never heard of such a game," said Delia, outright, already sufficiently grown-up to regard this as a reason.

"Let's not play it," said Margaret Amelia Rodman, languidly, and, though Delia had the most emphasis among us, Margaret Amelia was

our leader, and we abandoned the game. I cannot recall why Margaret Amelia was our leader, unless it was because she had so many hair-ribbons and, when we had pin fairs, always came with a whole paper, whereas the rest of us merely had some collected in a box, or else rows torn off. But I suppose that we must have selected her for some potentiality; or else it was that a talent for tyranny was hers, since this, like the habit of creeping on all fours and other survivals of prehistoric man, will often mark one of the early stages of individual growth.

This time Calista was peace-maker.

"Let's go for a walk," she said. "We can do that before supper."

"You'll have to be back in time to help *get* supper, won't you?" Delia asked Mary Elizabeth pointedly.

Again Mary Elizabeth was unperturbed, save for that faint flush.

"Yes," she said, "I will. So let's hurry."

We ran toward the school ground, by common consent the destination for short walks, with supper imminent, as Prospect Hill was dedicated to real walks, with nothing pressing upon us.

"It says 'Quick, quick, quick, quick,'" Mary

Elizabeth cried, dragging a stick on the pickets of, so to say, a passing fence.

"Why, that's nothing but the stick noise hitting on the fence noise," Delia explained loftily.

"Which makes the loudest noise — the stick or the fence?" Mary Elizabeth put it to her.

"Why — " said Delia, and Mary Elizabeth and I both laughed, like little demons, and made our sticks say, "Quick, quick, quick, quick" as far as the big post, that was so like a man standing there to stop us.

"See the poor tree. The walk's stepping on its feet!" cried Mary Elizabeth when we passed the Branchett's great oak, that had forced up the bricks of the walk. (They must already have been talking of taking it down, that hundred-year oak, to preserve the dignity of the side-walk, for they did so shortly after.)

This time it was Margaret Amelia who revolted.

"Trees can't walk," she said. "There aren't any *feet* there."

I took a hand. "You don't know sure," I reminded her. "When it's dark, maybe they do walk. I'll ask it."

By the time I had done whispering to the bark, Delia said she was going to tell her mother. "Such *lies*," she put it bluntly. "You'll never write a book, I don't care what you say. You got to tell the truth to write books."

"Everybody that tells the truth don't write a book," I contended — but sobered. I wanted passionately to write a book. What if this business of pretending, which Delia called lies should be in the way of truthful book-writing? But the habit was too strong for me. In that very moment we came upon a huge new ant-hill.

"Don't step on that ant-hill. See all the ants — they say to step over it!" I cried, and pushed Delia round it with some violence.

"Well — what makes you always so — *religious!*" she burst out, at the end of her patience.

I was still hotly denying this implication when we entered the school yard, and broke into running; for no reason, save that entrances and beginnings always made us want to run and shout.

The school yard, quite an ordinary place during school hours, became at the end of school a place no longer to be shunned, but wholly

desirable. Next to the wood yard, it was the most mysterious place that we knew. In the school yard were great cords of wood, suitable for hiding; a basement door, occasionally left open, from which at any moment the janitor might appear to drive us away; a band-stand, covered with names and lacking enough boards so that one might climb up without use of the steps; a high-board fence on which one always longed to walk at recess; a high platform from which one had unavailingly pined to jump; outside banisters down which, in school-time, no one might slide, trees which no one might climb, corner brick-work affording excellent steps, which, then, none might scale; broad outside window ledges on which none might sit, loose bricks in the walks ripe for the prying-up, but penalty attended; a pump on whose iron handle the lightest of us might ride save that, in school-time, this was forbidden too. In school-time this yard, so rich in possibilities, was compact of restrictions. None of these things might be done. Once a boy had been expelled for climbing on the schoolhouse roof; and thereupon his father, a painter by trade, had taken the boy to work with him, and when

we saw him in overalls wheeling his father's cart, we were told that *that* was what came of disobedience, although this boy might, easily no doubt, otherwise have become President of the United States.

But after school! Toward supper-time, or in vacation-time, we used to love to linger about the yard and snatch at these forbidden pleasures. That is, the girls loved it. The boys had long ago had them all, and were off across the tracks on new adventures unguessed of us.

If anybody found us here — we were promptly driven off. The principal did this as a matter of course, but the janitor had the same power and much more emphasis. If one of the board was seen passing, we hid behind everything and, as we were never clear just who belonged to the board, we hid when nearly all grown-folk passed. That the building and grounds were ours, paid for by our father's taxes, and that the school officials and even the tyrannical janitor were town servants to help us to make good use of our own, no more occurred to us than it occurred to us to find a ring in the ground, lift it, and descend steps. Nor as much, for we were always looking for a ring to lift. To be sure, we might

easily fall into serious mischief in this stolen use of our property; but that it was the function of one of these grown-ups, whom we were forever dodging, to be there with us, paid by the town to play with us, was as wild an expectation as that fairies should arrive with golden hoops and balls and wings. Wilder, for we were always expecting the fairies and, secretly, the wings.

That afternoon we did almost all these forbidden things — swings and seesaws and rings would have done exactly as well, only these had not been provided — and then we went to rest in the band-stand. Mary Elizabeth and I were feeling somewhat subdued — neither of us shone much in feats of skill, and here Delia and Margaret Amelia easily put us in our proper places. Calista was not daring, but she was a swift runner, and this entitled her to respect. Mary Elizabeth and I were usually the first ones caught, and the others were not above explaining to us frankly that this was why we preferred to play Pretend.

"Let's tell a story — you start it, Mary Elizabeth," I proposed, anxious for us two to return to standing, for in collaborations of this kind Mary

Elizabeth and I frankly shone — and the wish to shine, like the wish to cry out, is among the primitive phases of individual growth.

"Let Margaret Amelia start it," Delia tried to say, but already the story was started, Mary Elizabeth leaning far back, and beginning to braid and unbraid her long hair — not right away to the top of the braid, which was a serious matter and not to be lightly attempted with heavy hair, but just near the curling end.

"Once," she said, "a big gold sun was going along up in the sky, wondering what in the world — no, what in All-of-it to do with himself. For he was all made and done, nice and bright and shiny, and he wanted a place to be. So he knocked at all the worlds and said, 'Don't you want to hire a sun to do your urrants, take care of your garden, and behave like a fire and like a lamp?' But all the worlds didn't want him, because they all had engaged a sun first and they could only use one apiece, account of the climate. So one morning — he *knew* it was morning because he was shining, and when it was night he never shone — one morning . . ."

"Now leave somebody else," Delia suggested restlessly. "Leave Margaret Amelia tell."

So we turned to her. Margaret Amelia considered solemnly — perhaps it was her faculty for gravity that made us always look up to her — and took up the tale:

"One morning he met a witch. And he said, 'Witch, I wish you would — would give me something to eat. I'm very hungry.' So the witch took him to her kitchen and gave him a bowl of porridge, and it was hot and burned his mouth, and he asked for a drink of water, and — and —"

"What was the use of having her a witch if *that* was all he was going to ask her?" demanded Mary Elizabeth.

"They *always* have witches in the best stories," Margaret Amelia contended, "and anyway, that's all I'm going to tell."

Delia took up the tale uninvited.

"And he got his drink of water, pumped up polite by the witch herself, and she was going to put a portion in it. But while she was looking in the top drawer for the portion, the sun went away. And —"

This time it was I who intervened.

"'Portion!'" I said with superiority. "Who ever heard of anybody drinking a *portion?* That word is *potient.*"

Delia was plainly taken aback.

"You're thinking of long division," she said feebly.

"I'm thinking of 'Romeo and Juliet,'" I responded with dignity. "They had one, in the tomb, where Tybalt, all bloody —"

"Don't say that one — don't say it!" cried Margaret Amelia. "I can see that one awful after the light is out. Go on, somebody, quick."

To take up her share of the story, Betty Rodman refused, point-blank. I think that her admission to our group must have been principally on the credentials of sistership to one of us, a basis at once pathetic and lovely.

"I never can think of anything to have happen," Betty complained, "and if I make something happen, then it ends up the story."

Calista had a nail in her shoe, and was too much absorbed in pounding it down with a stone to be approached; so, when we had all minutely examined the damage which the nail had wrought, it was my turn to take up the tale. And then the thing happened which was always happening to me: I could think of nothing to have the story do. At night, and

when I was alone, I could dream out the most fascinating adventures, but with expectant faces — or a clean pad — before me, I was dumb and powerless.

"I don't feel like telling one just now," said I, the proposer of the game, and went on digging leaves out of a crevice in the rotting rail. So Mary Elizabeth serenely took up the tale where she had left it.

"One morning he looked over a high sky mountain — that's what suns like to do best because it is so becoming — and he shone in a room of the sky where a little black star was sleeping. And he thought he would ask it what to do. So he said to it, 'Little Black Star, where shall I be, now that I am all done and finished, nice and shiny?' And the Little Black Star said: 'You're not done. What made you think you were done? Hardly anybody is ever done. I'll tell you what to be. Be like a carriage and take all us little dark stars in, and whirl and whirl for about a million years, and make us all get bright too, and *then* maybe you'll be a true sun — but not all done, even then.' So that's what he decided to do, and he's up there now, only you can't see him,

because he's so far, and our sun is so bright, and he's whirling and whirling, and lots more like him, getting to be made."

Delia followed Mary Elizabeth's look into the blue.

"I don't believe it," said she. "The sun is biggest and the moon is next. How could there be any other sun? And it don't whirl. It don't even rise and set. It stands still. Miss Messmore said so."

We looked at Mary Elizabeth, probably I alone having any impulse to defend her. And we became aware that she was quite white and trembling. In the same moment we understood that we were hearing something which we had been hearing without knowing that we heard. It was a thin, wavering strain of singing, in a man's voice. We scrambled up, and looked over the edge of the band-stand. Coming unevenly down the broken brick walk that cut the schoolhouse grounds was Mary Elizabeth's father. His hat was gone. It was he who was singing. He looked as he had looked that first day that I had seen him in the wood yard. We knew what was the matter. And all of us unconsciously did the cruel thing of turning and staring at Mary Elizabeth.

In a moment she was over the side of the band-stand and running to him. She took him by the hand, and we saw that she meant to lead him home. Her little figure looked very tiny beside his gaunt frame, in its loosely hanging coat. I remember how the sun was pouring over them, and over the brilliant green beyond where blackbirds were walking. I have no knowledge of what made me do it — perhaps it was merely an attitude, created by the afternoon, of standing up for Mary Elizabeth no matter what befell; or it may have been a child's crude will to challenge things; at any rate, without myself really deciding it, I suddenly took the way that she had taken, and caught up with the two.

"Mary Elizabeth," I meant to say, "I'm going."

But in fact I said nothing, and only kept along beside her. She looked at me mutely, and made a motion to me to turn back. When her father took our hands and stumblingly ran with us, I heartily wished that I had turned back. But nearly all the way he went peaceably enough. Long before we reached their home across the tracks, however, I heard the six o'clock whistles

blow, and pictured the wrath of the mistress of the New Family when Mary Elizabeth had not returned in time to "help with the supper." Very likely now they would not let her stay, and this new companionship of ours would have to end. Mary Elizabeth's home was on the extreme edge of the town, and ordinarily I was not allowed to cross the tracks. Mary Elizabeth might even move away — that had happened to some of us, and the night had descended upon such as these and we had never heard of them again: Hattie Schenck, whom I had loved with unequalled devotion, where, for example, was she? Was it, then, to be the same with Mary Elizabeth?

Her mother saw us coming. She hurried down to the gateway — the gate was detached and lying in the weeds within — and even then I was struck by the way of maternity with which she led her husband to the house. I remember her as large-featured, with the two bones of her arms sharply defined by a hollow running from wrist to elbow, and she constantly held her face as if the sun were shining in her eyes, but there was no sun shining there. And somehow, at the gate she had a way of receiving him, and of

taking him with her. Hardly anything was said. The worst of it was that no one had to explain anything. Two of the little children ran away and hid. Someone dodged behind an open door. The man's wife led him to the broken couch, and he lay down there like a little child. Standing in the doorway of that forlorn, disordered, ill-smelling room, I first dimly understood what I never have forgotten: That the man was not poor because he drank, as the village thought, but that he drank because he was poor. Instead of the horror at a drunken man which the village had laid it upon me to feel, I suddenly saw Mary Elizabeth's father as her mother saw him when she folded her gingham apron and spread it across his shoulders and said:

"Poor lad."

And when, in a few minutes, Mary Elizabeth and I were out on the street again, running silently, I remember feeling a great blind rage against the whole village and against the whole world that couldn't seem to think what to do any more than Mary Elizabeth and I could think.

The man of the New Family was watering the lawn, which meant that supper was done.

We slipped in our back gate, — the New Family had none, — climbed the fence by my play-house, dropped down into the New Family's garden, and entered their woodshed. In my own mind I had settled that I was of small account if I could not give the New Lady such a picture of what had happened that Mary Elizabeth should not lose her place, and I should not lose her.

The kitchen door was ajar. The dish-pan was in the sink, the kettle was steaming on the stove. And from out the dining-room abruptly appeared Calista and *Delia*, bearing plates.

"Girls!" I cried, but Mary Elizabeth was dumb.

Delia carefully set down her plate in the dish-pan and addressed me:

"Well, you needn't think you're the only one that knows what's proper, miss," she said.

Calista was more simple.

"We wanted to get 'em all done before you got back," she owned. "We would, if Margaret Amelia and Betty had of come. They wanted to, but they wouldn't let 'em."

Back of Delia and Calista appeared the mistress of the house. She had on her afternoon

dress, and her curl papers were out, and she actually smiled at Mary Elizabeth and me.

"*Now* then!" she said to us.

If I could have made a dream for that night, I think it would have been that ever and ever so many of us were sitting in rows, waiting to be counted. And a big sun came by, whirling and growing, to take us, and we thought we couldn't all get in. But there was room, whether we had been counted or not.

XI

DOLLS

THE advent of the New Boy changed the face of the neighbourhood. Formerly I had been accustomed to peep through cracks in the fence only to look into a field of corn that grew at the side; or, on the other side, into raspberry bushes, where at any moment raspberries might be gathered and dropped over the fence to me. Also, there was one place in the deep green before those bushes where blue-eyed grass grew, and I had to watch for that. Then there was a great spotted dog that sometimes came, and when he had passed, I used to wait long by the high boards lest he should return and leap at me to whom, so far, he had never paid the slightest attention. As a child, my mother had once jumped down into a manger where a great spotted dog was inadvertently lying and, though from all accounts he was far more frightened than she, yet I feared his kind more than any other. . . . The only real excitement

that we had been wont to know in the neighbourhood occurred whenever there was a Loose Horse. Somebody would give the alarm, and then we would all make sure that the gates were latched and we would retire to watch him fearfully, where he was quietly cropping the roadside grass. But sometimes, too, a Loose Horse would run — and then I was terrified by the sound of his hoofs galloping on the sidewalk and striking on the bricks and boards. I was always afraid that a Loose Horse would see me, and nights, after one had disturbed our peace, I would dream that he was trying to find me, and that he had come peering between the dining-room blinds; and though I hid under the red cotton spread that was used "between-meals," it never came down far enough, and he always stood there interminably waiting, and found me, through the fringe.

But all these excitements were become as nothing. A new occupation presented itself. A dozen times a day now I had to watch through the fence-cracks, or through the knot-hole, or boldly between the pickets of the front fence, at the fascinating performances of the New Boy and his troops of friends. At any moment both

Mary Elizabeth and I would abandon what we were doing to go to stare at the unaccountable activities which were forever agitating them. They were always producing something from their pockets and examining it, with their heads together, or manufacturing something or burying something, or disputing about something unguessed and alluring. Their whole world was filled with doing, doing, doing, whereas ours was made wholly of watching things get done.

On an afternoon Mary Elizabeth and I were playing together in our side yard. It was the day for Delia's music lesson, and as she usually did her whole week's practising in the time immediately preceding that event, the entire half day was virtually wasted. We could hear her going drearily over and over the first and last movements of "At Home," which she had memorized and could play like lightning, while the entire middle of the piece went with infinite deliberation. Calista was, we understood (because of some matter pertaining to having filled the bath-tub and waded in it and ruined the dining-room ceiling), spending the day in her bed. And Margaret Amelia and Betty Rodman were being kept at home because the family

had company; and such was the prestige of the Rodmans that the two contrived to make this circumstance seem enviable, and the day before had pictured to us their embroidered white dresses and blue ribbons, and blue stockings, and the Charlotte Russe for supper, until we felt left out, and not in the least as if their company were of a kind with events of the sort familiar to us. Since I have grown up, I have observed this variety of genius in others. There is one family which, when it appears in afternoon gowns on occasions when I have worn a street dress, has power to make me wonder how I can have failed to do honour to the day; but who, when they wear street gowns and I am dressed for afternoon, invariably cause me to feel inexcusably overdressed. It is a kind of genius for the fit, and we must believe that it actually designates the atmosphere which an occasion shall breathe.

Mary Elizabeth and I were playing Dolls. We rarely did this on a pleasant day in Summer, Dolls being an indoor game, matched with carpets and furniture and sewing baskets rather than with blue sky and with the soft brilliance of the grass. But that day we had brought

everything out in the side yard under the little catalpa tree, and my eleven dolls (counting the one without any face, and Irene Helena, the home-made one, and the two penny ones) were in a circle on chairs and boxes and their backs, getting dressed for the tea-party. There was always going to be a tea-party when you played Dolls — you of course had to lead up to something, and what else was there to lead up to save a tea-party? To be sure, there might be an occasional marriage, but boy-dolls were never very practical; they were invariably smaller than the bride-doll, and besides we had no mosquito-netting suitable for a veil. Sometimes we had them go for a walk, and once or twice we had tried playing that they were house-cleaning; but these operations were not desirable, because in neither of them could the dolls dress up, and the desirable part of playing dolls is, as everybody knows, to dress them in their best. That is the game. That, and the tea-party.

"Blue or rose-pink?" Mary Elizabeth inquired, indicating the two best gowns of the doll she was dressing.

It was a difficult question. We had never

SHE SETTLED EVERYTHING IN THAT WAY; SHE COUNTED THE PETALS OF FENNEL DAISIES AND BLEW THISTLE FROM DANDELIONS.

been able to decide which of these two colours we preferred. There was the sky for precedent of blue, but then rose-pink we loved so to say!

"If they's one cloud in the sky, we'll put on the rose-pink one," said Mary Elizabeth. "And if there isn't any, that'll mean blue."

She settled everything that way — she counted the petals of fennel daisies, blew the thistle from dandelions, did one thing if she could find twelve acorns and another if they were lacking. Even then Mary Elizabeth seemed always to be watching for a guiding hand, to be listening for a voice to tell her what to do, and trying to find these in things of Nature.

We dressed the Eleven in their best frocks, weighing each choice long, and seated them about a table made of a box covered with a towel. We sliced a doughnut and with it filled two small baskets for each end of the table, on which rested my toy castor and such of my dishes as had survived the necessity which I had felt for going to bed with the full set, on the night of the day, some years before, when I had acquired them. We picked all the flowers suitable for doll decorations — clover, sorrel, candytuft, sweet alyssum. We observed the unities

by retiring for a time sufficient to occupy the tea-party in disposing of the feast; and then we came back and sat down and stared at them. Irene Helena, I remember, had slipped under the table in a heap, a proceeding which always irritated me, as nakedly uncovering the real depths of our pretence — and I jerked her up and set her down, like some maternal Nemesis.

In that moment a wild, I may almost say *thick*, shriek sounded through our block, and there came that stimulating thud-thud of feet on earth that accompanies all the best diversions, and also there came the cracking of things, — whips, or pistols, or even a punch, which rapidly operated will do almost as well. And down the yards of the block and over the fences and over the roof of my play-house came tumbling and shrieking the New Boy, and in his wake were ten of his kind.

Usually they raced by with a look in their eyes which we knew well, though we never could distinguish whether it meant robbers or pirates or dragons or the enemy. Usually they did not even see us. But that day something in our elaborate preparation to receive somebody or to welcome something, and our eternal mo-

ment of suspended animation at which they found us, must have caught the fancy of the New Boy.

"Halt!" he roared with the force and effect of a steam whistle, and in a moment they were all stamping and breathing about Mary Elizabeth and me.

We sprang up in instant alarm and the vague, pathetic, immemorial impulse to defence. We need not have feared. The game was still going forward and we were merely pawns.

"Who is the lord of this castle?" demanded the New Boy.

"Bindyliggs," replied Mary Elizabeth, without a moment's hesitation, a name which I believe neither of us to have heard before.

"Where is this Lord of Bindyliggs?" the New Boy pressed it.

Mary Elizabeth indicated the woodshed. "At meat," she added gravely.

"Forward!" the New Boy instantly commanded, and the whole troop disappeared in our shed. We heard wood fall, and the clash of meeting weapons, and the troop reappeared, two by way of the low window.

"Enough!" cried the New Boy, grandly. "We have spared him, but there is not a moment to

lose. You must come with us *immediately*. What you got to eat?"

Raptly, we gave them, from under the wistful noses of Irene Helena and the doll without the face and the rest, the entire sliced doughnut, and two more doughnuts, dipped in sugar, which we had been saving so as to have something to look forward to.

"Come with us," said the New Boy, graciously. "To horse! We may reach the settlement by nightfall — *if* we escape the Brigands in the Wood. The Black Wood," he added.

Even then, I recall, I was smitten with wonder that he who had shown so little imagination in that matter of dirt and apples and potatoes should here be teeming with fancy on his own familiar ground. It was years before I understood that there are almost as many varieties of imaginative as of religious experience.

Fascinated, we dropped everything and followed. The way led, it appeared, to the Wells's barn, a huge, red barn in the block, with doors always invitingly open and chickens pecking about, and doves on a little platform close to the pointed roof.

"Aw, say, you ain't goin' to take 'em along,

are you?" demanded one knight, below his voice. "They'll spoil everythin'."

"You're *rescuin'* 'em, you geezer," the New Boy explained. "You got to have 'em along till you get 'em rescued, ain't you? Arrest that man!" he added. "Put him in double irons with chains and balls on. And gag him, to make sure."

And it was done, with hardly a moment's loss of time.

We went round by the walk — a course to which the arrested one had time to refer in further support of his claim as to our undesirability. But he was drowned in the important topics that were afoot: the new cave to be explored where the Branchetts were putting a cellar under the dining-room, mysterious boxes suspected to contain dynamite being unloaded into the Wells's cellar, and the Court of the Seven Kings, to which, it seemed, we were being conveyed in the red barn.

"Shall we give 'em the password?" the New Boy asked, *sotto voce*, as we approached the rendezvous. And Mary Elizabeth and I trembled as we realized that he was thinking of sharing the password with us.

"*Naw!*" cried the Arrested One violently. "It'll be all over town."

The New Boy drew himself up — he must have been good to look at, for I recall his compact little figure and his pink cheeks.

"Can't you tell when you're gagged?" he inquired with majesty. "You're playin' like a girl yourself. I can give the password for 'em, though," he added reasonably. So we all filed in the red barn, to the Court of the Seven Kings, and each boy whispered the password into the first manger, but Mary Elizabeth and I had it whispered for us.

What the Court of the Seven Kings might have held for us we were never to know. At that instant there appeared lumbering down the alley a load of hay. Seated in the midst was a small figure whom we recognized as Stitchy Branchett; and he rose and uttered a roar.

"Come on, fellows!" he said. "We dast ride over to the Glen. I was lookin' for you. Father said so." And Stitchy threw himself on his back, and lifted and waved his heels.

Already our liberators were swarming up the hay-rack, which had halted for them. In a twinkling they were sunk in that fragrance,

kicking their heels even as their host. Already they had forgotten Mary Elizabeth and me, nor did they give us good-bye.

We two turned and went through the Wells's yard, back to the street. Almost at once we were again within range of the sounds of Delia, practising interminably on her "At Home."

"I never rode on a load of hay," said Mary Elizabeth at length.

Neither had I, though I almost always walked backward to watch one when it passed me.

"What do you *s'pose* the password was?" said Mary Elizabeth.

It was days before we gave over wondering. And sometimes in later years I have caught myself speculating on that lost word.

"I wonder what we were rescued from," said Mary Elizabeth when we passed our woodshed door.

We stopped and peered within. No Lord of Bindyliggs, though we had almost expected to see him stretched there, bound and helpless.

What were we rescued from? *We should never know.*

We rounded the corner by the side yard. There sat our staring dolls, drawn up about the

tea-table, static all. As I looked at them I was seized and possessed by an unreasoning fury. And I laid hold on Irene Helena, and had her by the heels, and with all my strength I pounded her head against the trunk of the catalpa tree.

Mary Elizabeth understood — when did she not understand?

"Which one can I — which one can I?" she cried excitedly.

"All of 'em!" I shouted, and one after another we picked up the Eleven by their skirts, and we threw them far and wide in the grass, and the penny dolls we hurled into the potato patch.

Then Mary Elizabeth looked at me aghast.

"Your dolls!" she said.

"I don't care!" I cried savagely. "I'll never play 'em again. I hate 'em!" And I turned to Mary Elizabeth with new eyes. "Let's go down town after supper," I whispered.

"I could," she said, "but you won't be let."

"I won't ask," I said. "I'll go. When you get done, come on over."

I scorned to gather up the dolls. They were

in the angle below the parlour windows, and no one saw them. As soon as supper was finished, I went to my room and put on my best shoes, which I was not allowed to wear for everyday. Then I tipped my birthday silver dollar out of my bank and tied it in the corner of my handkerchief. Down in the garden I waited for Mary Elizabeth.

It was hardly dusk when she came. We had seen nothing of Delia, and we guessed that she was to stay in the house for the rest of the day as penance for having, without doubt, played "At Home" too badly.

"You better not do it," Mary Elizabeth whispered. "They might . . ."

"Come on," I said only.

"Let's try a June grass," she begged. "If the seeds all come off in my teeth, we'll go. But if they don't —"

"Come on," said I, "I'm not going to monkey with signs any more."

We climbed the back fence, partly so that the chain, weighted with a pail of stones, might not creak, and partly because to do so seemed more fitting to the business in hand. We ran crouching, thereby arousing the attention of

old Mr. Branchett, who was training a Virginia creeper along his back fence.

"Hello, hello," said he. "Pretty good runners for girls, seems to me."

Neither of us replied. Our souls were suddenly sickened at this sort of dealing.

Wisconsin Street was a blaze of light. The 'buses were on their way from the "depots" to the hotels — nobody knew who might be in those 'buses. They were the nexus between us and the unguessed world. Strangers were on the streets. Everything was in motion. Before Morrison's grocery they were burning rubbish, some boys from the other end of town were running unconcernedly through the flames, and the smell of the smoke set us tingling. At the corner a man was pasting a circus bill — we stopped a moment to look down the throat of the hippopotamus. Away up the street a band struck up, and we took hold of hands again, and ran.

We crossed the big square by the City Bank, under the hissing arc lamp. By the post-office a crowd of men and boys was standing, and between the files young women whom we knew, wearing ribbons and feathers, were passing in

and out of the office and laughing. Bard's jewellery store was brilliant — it looked lighter than any other store with its window of dazzling cut glass and its wonderful wall of clocks whose pendulums never kept pace. In a saloon a piano was playing — we glanced in with a kind of joyous fear at the green screen beyond the door. We saw Alma Fremont, whose father kept a grocery store, standing in the store door with a stick of pink candy thrust in a lemon, and we thought on the joy of having a father who was a grocer. We longed to stare in the barber-shop window, and looked away. But our instinctive destination was the place before the Opera House, where the band was playing. We reached it, and stood packed in the crowd, close to the blare of the music, and shivered with delight.

"If only the fire-engine would come," Mary Elizabeth breathed in my ear.

But in a little while the guffaws, the jostling, the proximity of dirty coats, the odour of stale tobacco must have disturbed us, because gradually we edged a little away, and stood on the edge of the crowd, against an iron rail outside a billiard room. The band ceased, and went up

into the hall. We had a distinct impulse to do the next thing. What was there to do next? What was it that the boys did when they went down town evenings? What else did they do while we were tidying our play-houses for the night? For here we were, longing for play, if only we could think what to do.

I felt a hand beneath my chin, lifting my face. There, in the press, stood my Father. Over his arm he carried my black jacket with the Bedford cord.

"Mother thought you might be cold," he said.

I put on the jacket, and he took Mary Elizabeth and me by the hand, and we walked slowly back down Wisconsin Street.

"We will see Mary Elizabeth safely home first," my Father said, and we accompanied her to the New Family's door.

Once in our house, it was I who proposed going to bed, and the suggestion met with no opposition. Upstairs, I slipped the screen from my window and leaned out in the dusk. The night, warm, fragrant, significant, was inviting me to belong to it, was asking me, even as bright day had asked me, what it had in common with

the stuffiness and dulness of forever watching others do things. Something hard touched my hand. It was my birthday dollar. It had not occurred to me to spend it.

I saw my Father stroll back down the street, lighting a cigar. Below stairs I could hear my Mother helping to put away the supper dishes. A dozen boys raced through the alley, just on their way down town. So long as they came home at a stated hour at night, and turned up at table with their hands clean, who asked them where they had been? "Where have you been?" they said to me, the moment I entered the house — and to Delia and Calista and Margaret Amelia and Betty. We had often talked about it. And none of us had even ridden on a load of hay. We had a vague expectation that it would be different when we grew up. A sickening thought came to me: *Would it be different, or was this to be forever?*

I ran blindly down the stairs where my Mother was helping to put away the supper dishes — in the magic of the night, helping to put away the supper dishes.

"Mother!" I cried, "Mother! Who made it so much harder to be a girl?"

She turned and looked at me, her face startled, and touched me — I remember how gently she touched me.

"Before you die," she said, "it will be easier."

I thought then that she meant that I would grow used to it. Now I know that she meant what I meant when I woke that night, and remembered my dolls lying out in the grass and the dew, and was not sorry, but glad: Glad that the time was almost come — for real playthings.

XII

BIT-BIT

At the Rodmans', who lived in a huge house on a hill, some of the rooms had inscriptions in them — or what I should have called mottoes — cunningly lettered and set about. Some of these were in Margaret Amelia's and Betty's room, above the mirror, the bed, the window; and there was one downstairs on a panel above the telephone. The girls said that they had an aunt who had written them "on purpose," an aunt who had had stories in print. In my heart I doubted the part about the printed stories, and so did Mary Elizabeth, but we loved Margaret Amelia and Betty too well to let this stand between us. Also, we were caught by the inscriptions. They were these:

FOR A CRADLE*

I cannot tell you who I am
Nor what I'm going to be.

* Copyright, 1908, by Harper & Brothers.

You who are wise and know your ways
Tell me.

FOR THE MIRROR

Look in the deep of me. What are we going to do?
If I am I, as I am, who in the world are you?

FOR AN IVORY COMB

Use me and think of spirit, and spirit yet to be.
This is the jest: Could soul touch soul if it were not for me?

FOR THE DOLL'S HOUSE

Girl-doll would be a little lamp
And shine like something new.
Boy-doll would be a telephone
And have the world speak through.
The Poet-doll would like to be
A tocsin with a tongue
To other little dolls like bells
Most sensitively rung.
The Baby-doll would be a flower,
The Dinah-doll a star,
And all — how ignominious!
Are only what they are.

WHERE THE BOUGHS TOUCH THE WINDOW

We lap on the indoor shore — the waves of the leaf mere,
We try to tell you as well as we can : We wonder what you hear ?

FOR ANOTHER WINDOW

I see the stones, I see the stars,
I know not what they be.
They always say things to themselves
And now and then to me.
But when I try to look between
Big stones and little stars,
I almost know . . . but what I know
Flies through the window-bars.

And downstairs, on the Telephone :

I, the absurdity,
Proving what cannot be.
Come, when you talk with me
Does it become you well
To doubt a miracle ?

We did not understand all of them, but we liked them. And I am sure now that the inscriptions were partly responsible for the fact

that in a little time, with Mary Elizabeth and me to give them encouragement, everything, indoors and out, had something to say to us. These things we did not confide to the others, not even to Margaret Amelia and Betty who, when we stood still to spell out the inscriptions, waited a respectful length of time and then plucked at our aprons and said: "Come on till we show you something," which was usually merely a crass excuse to get us away.

So Mary Elizabeth and I discovered, by comparing notes, that at night our Clothes on the chair by the bed would say: "We are so tired. Don't look at us — we feel so limp."

And the Night would say: "What a long time the Day had you, and how he made you work. Now rest and forget and stop being you, till morning."

Sleep would say: "Here I come. Let me in your brain and I will pull your eyes shut, like little blinds."

And in the morning the Stairs would say: "Come! We are all here, stooping, ready for you to step down on our shoulders."

Breakfast would say: "Now I'm going to be you — now I'm going to be you! And I have to be cross or nice, just as you are."

Every fire that warmed us, every tree that shaded us, every path that we took, all these "answered back" and were familiars. Everything spoke to us, save only one. And this one thing was Work. Our playthings in the cupboard would talk to us all day long *until* the moment that we were told to put them in order, and then instantly they all fell into silence. Pulling weeds in the four o'clock bed, straightening books, tidying the outdoor play-house — it was always the same. Whatever we worked at kept silent.

It was on a June morning, when the outdoors was so busy and beautiful that it was like a golden bee buried in a golden rose, that I finally refused outright to pick up a brown sunhat and some other things in the middle of the floor. Everything outdoors and in was smiling and calling, and to do a task was like going to bed, so far as the joy of the day was concerned. This I could not explain, but I said that I would not do the task, and this was high treason.

Sitting in a straight-backed chair all alone for half an hour thereafter — the usual capital punishment — was like cutting off the head of the beautiful Hour that I had meant to have.

And I tried to think it out. Why, in an otherwise wonderful world, did Work have to come and spoil everything ?

I do not recall that I came to any conclusion. How could I, at a time that was still teaching the Hebraic doctrine that work is a curse, instead of the new gospel — always dimly divined by children before our teaching has corrupted them, — that being busy is being alive, and that all work may be play if only we are shown how to pick out the kind that is play to us, and that doing nothing is a kind of death.

And while I sat there alone on that straight-backed chair, I wish that I, as I am now, might have called in Mary Elizabeth, whom I could see drearily polishing the New Family's lamp-chimneys, and that I might have told the story of Bit-bit.

Bit-bit, the smallest thing in the world, sat on the slipperiest edge of the highest mountain in the farthest land, weaving a little garment of sweet-grass. Then out of the valley a great Deev arose and leaned his elbows on the highest mountain and said what he thought — which is always a dangerous business.

"Then out of the valley a great Deev arose."

"Bit-bit," said the Deev, "how dare you make up my sweet-grass so disgustin' extravagant?"

(It is almost impossible for a Deev to say his *ing's*.)

"Deevy dear," said Bit-bit, without looking up from his work, "I have to make a garment to help clothe the world. Don't wrinkle up my plan. And *don't* put your elbows on the table."

"About my elbows," said the Deev, "you are perfectly right, though Deevs always do that with their elbows. But as to that garment," he added, "I'd like to know why you have to help clothe the world?"

"Deevy dear," said Bit-bit, still not looking up from his work, "I have to do so, because it's this kind of a world. *Please* don't wrinkle up things."

"I," said the Deev, plainly, "will now show you what kind of a world this really is. And I rather think I'll destroy you with a great destruction."

Then the Deev took the highest mountain and he tied its streams and cataracts together to make a harness, and he named the mountain new, and he drove it all up and down the earth. And he cried behind it:

"Ho, Rhumbthumberland, steed of the clouds, trample the world into trifles and plough it up for play. Bit-bit is being taught his lesson."

From dawn he did this until the sky forgot pink and remembered only blue and until the sun grew so hot that it took even the sky's attention, and the Deev himself was ready to drop. And then he pulled on the reins and Rhumbthumberland, steed of the clouds, stopped trampling and let the Deev lean his elbows on his back. And there, right between the Deev's elbows, sat Bit-bit, weaving his garment of sweet-grass.

"Thunders of spring," cried the Deev, "aren't you destroyed with a great destruction?"

But Bit-bit never looked up, he was so busy.

"Has anything happened?" he asked politely, however, not wishing to seem indifferent to the Deev's agitation — though secretly, in his little head, he hated having people plunge at him with their eyebrows up and expect him to act surprised too. When they did that, it always made him savage-calm.

"The world is trampled into trifles and ploughed up for play," said the exasperated

Deev, "*that's* what's happened. How dare you pay no attention?"

"Deevy dear," said Bit-bit, still not looking up from his task, "I have to work, whether it's this kind of a world or not. I *wish* you wouldn't wrinkle up things."

Then the Deev's will ran round and round in his own head like a fly trying to escape from a dark hole — that is the way of the will of all Deevs — and pretty soon his will got out and went buzzle-buzzle-buzzle, which is no proper sound for anybody's will to make. And when it did that, the Deev went off and got a river, and he climbed up on top of Rhumbthumberland and he swung the river about his head like a ribbon and then let it fall from the heights like a lady's scarf, and then he held down one end with his great boot and the other end he emptied into the horizon. From the time of the heat of the sun he did this until the shadows were set free from the west and lengthened over the land, shaking their long hair, and then he lifted his foot and let the river slip and it trailed off into the horizon and flowed each way.

"*Now* then!" said the Deev, disgustingly pompous.

But when he looked down, there, sitting on his own great foot, high and dry and pleasant, was Bit-bit, weaving his garment of sweet-grass and saying :

"Deevy dear, a river washed me up here and I was so busy I didn't have time to get down."

The Deev stood still, thinking, and his thoughts flew in and out like birds, but always they seemed to fly against window-panes in the air, through which there was no passing. And the Deev said, in his head :

"Is there nothing in this created cosmos that will stop this little scrap from working to clothe the world ? Or must I play Deev in earnest ?"

And that was what he finally decided to do. So he said things to his arms, and his arms hardened into stuff like steel, and spread out like mighty wings. And with these the Deev began to beat the air. And he beat it and beat it until it frothed. It frothed like white-of-egg and like cream and like the mid-waters of torrents, frothed a mighty froth, such as I supposed could never be. And when the froth was stiff enough to stand alone, the Deev took his steel-wing arm for a ladle, and he began to spread the froth upon the earth. And he spread and spread until

the whole earth was like an enormous chocolate cake, thick with white frosting — one layer, two layers, three layers, disgustingly extravagant, so that the little Deevs, if there had been any, would never have got the dish scraped. Only there wasn't any dish, so they needn't have minded.

And when he had it all spread on, the Deev stood up and dropped his steel arms down — and even they were tired at the elbow, like any true, egg-beating arm — and he looked down at the great cake he had made. And there, on the top of the frosting, which was already beginning to harden, was sitting Bit-bit, weaving his garment of sweet-grass and talking about the weather:

"I think there is going to be a storm," said Bit-bit, "the air around here has been so disgustingly hard to breathe."

Then, very absently, the Deev let the steel out of his arms and made them get over being wings, and, in a place so deep in his own head that nothing had ever been thought there before, he *thought:*

"There is more to this than I ever knew there is to anything."

So he leaned over, all knee-deep in the frosting as he was, and he said:

"Bit-bit, say a great truth and a real answer: What is the reason that my little ways don't bother you? Or kill you? Or keep you from making your garment of sweet-grass?"

"Why," said Bit-bit, in surprise, but never looking up from his work, "Deevy dear, that's easy. I'm much, much, *much* too busy."

"Scrap of a thing," said the Deev, "too busy to mind cataracts and an earth trampled to trifles and then frosted with all the air there is?"

"Too busy," assented Bit-bit, snapping off his thread. "And now I *do* hope you are not going to wrinkle up things any more."

"No," said the Deev, with decision, "I ain't." (Deevs are always ungrammatical when you take them by surprise.) And he added very shrewdly, for he was a keen Deev and if he saw that he could learn, he was willing to learn, which is three parts of all wisdom: "Little scrap, teach me to do a witchcraft. Teach me to work."

At that Bit-bit laid down his task in a minute.

"What do you want to make?" he asked.

The Deev thought for a moment.

"I want to make a palace and a garden and a moat for *me*," said he. "I'm tired campin' around in the air."

"If that's all," said Bit-bit, "I'm afraid I can't help you. I thought you wanted to work. Out of all the work there is in the world I should think of another one if I were you, Deevy."

"Well, then, I want to make a golden court dress for *me*, all embroidered and flowered and buttoned and gored and spliced," said the Deev, or whatever these things are called in the clothing of Deevs; "I want to make one. I'm tired goin' around in rompers." (It wasn't rompers, really, but it was what Deevs wear instead, and you wouldn't know the name, even if I told you.)

"Excuse me," said Bit-bit, frankly, "I won't waste time like that. Don't you want to *work?*"

"Yes," said the Deev, "I do. Maybe I don't know what work is."

"Maybe you don't," agreed Bit-bit. "But I can fix that. I'm going for a walk now, and there's just room for you. Come along."

So they started off, and it was good walking, for by now the sun had dried up all the frosting;

and the Deev trotted at Bit-bit's heels, and they made a very funny pair. So funny that Almost Everything watched them go by, and couldn't leave off watching them go by, and so followed them all the way. Which was what Bit-bit had *thought* would happen. And when he got to a good place, Bit-bit stood still and told the Deev to turn round. And there they were, staring face to face with Almost Everything: Deserts and towns and men and women and children and laws and governments and railroads and factories and forests and food and drink.

"There's your work," said Bit-bit, carelessly.

"Where?" asked the Deev, just like other folks.

"*Where?*" repeated Bit-bit, nearly peevish. "Look at this desert that's come along behind us. Why don't you swing a river over your head — you *could* do that, couldn't you, Deevy? — and make things grow on that desert, and let people live on it, and turn 'em into folks? Why don't you?"

"It ain't amusin' enough," said the Deev.

(Deevs are often ungrammatical when they don't take pains; and this Deev wasn't taking *any* pains.)

"Well," said Bit-bit, "then look at this town that has come along behind us, full of dirt and disease and laziness and worse. Why don't you harness up a mountain — you *could* do that, couldn't you, Deevy ? — and plough up the earth and trample it down and let people live as they were meant to live, and turn them into folks ? Why don't you ?"

"It couldn't be done that way," said the Deev, very much excited and disgustingly certain.

"Well," said Bit-bit, "then look at the men and women and children that have come along behind us. What about them — what about *them?* Why don't you make your arms steel and act as if you had wings, and beat the world into a better place for them to live, instead of making a cake of it. You could do it, Deevy — *anybody* could do that."

"Yes," said the Deev, "I could do that. But it don't appeal to me."

(Deevs are always ungrammatical when they are being emphatic, and now the Deev was being very emphatic. He was a keen Deev, but he would only learn what he wanted to learn.)

"Deevy *dear*," cried Bit-bit, in distress because the Deev was such a disgusting creature, "then at least do get some sweet-grass and make a little garment to help clothe the world?"

"What's the use?" said the Deev. "Let it go naked. It's always been that way."

So, since the Deev would not learn the work witchcraft, Bit-bit, very sorrowful, stood up and said a great truth and made a real answer — which is always a dangerous business.

"You will, you will, you will do these things," he cried, "because it's that kind of a world."

And then the Deev, who had all along been getting more and more annoyed, pieced together his will and his ideas and his annoyance, and they all went buzzle-buzzle-buzzle together till they made an act. And the act was that he stepped sidewise into space, and he picked up the earth and put it between his knees, and he cracked it hard enough so that it should have fallen into uncountable bits.

"It's my nut," said the Deev, "and now I'm going to eat it up."

But lo, from the old shell there came out a fair new kernel of a world, so lustrous and lovely that the Deev was blinded and hid his eyes.

Only first he had seen how the deserts were flowing with rivers and the towns were grown fair under willing hands for men and women and children to live there. And there, with Almost Everything, sat Bit-bit in his place, weaving a little garment of sweet-grass to clothe some mite of the world.

"Now this time try not to wrinkle things all up, Deev," said Bit-bit. "I must say, you've been doing things disgustingly inhuman."

So after that the Deev was left camping about in the air, trying to make for himself new witch-crafts. And there he is to this day, being a disgusting creature generally, and *only* those who are as busy as Bit-bit are safe from him.

XIII

WHY

THERE was a day when Mary Elizabeth and Delia and Calista and Betty and I sat under the Eating Apple tree and had no spirit to enter upon anything. Margaret Amelia was not with us, and her absence left us relaxed and without initiative; for it was not as if she had gone to the City, or to have her dress tried on, or her hair washed, or as if she were absorbed in any real occupation. Her absence was due to none of these things. Margaret Amelia was in disgrace. She was, in fact, confined in her room with every expectation of remaining there until supper time.

"What'd she do?" we had breathlessly inquired of Betty when she had appeared alone with her tidings.

"Well," replied Betty, "it's her paper dolls and her button-house. She always leaves 'em around. She set up her button-house all over the rug in the parlour — you know,

the rug that its patterns make rooms? An' she had her paper dolls living in it. That was this morning — and we forgot 'em. And after dinner, while we're outdoors, the minister came. And he walked into the buttons and onto the glass dangler off the lamp that we used for a folding-doors. And he slid a long ways on it. And he scrushed it," Betty concluded resentfully "And now she's in her room."

We pondered it. There was justice there, we saw that. But shut Margaret Amelia in a room! It was as ignominious as caging a captain.

"Did she cry?" we indelicately demanded.

"Awful," said Betty. "She wouldn't of cared if it had only been raining," she added.

We looked hard at the sky. We should have been willing to have it rain to make lighter Margaret Amelia's durance, and sympathy could go no further. But there was not a cloud.

It was Mary Elizabeth who questioned the whole matter.

"How," said she, "does it do any good to shut her up in her room?"

We had never thought of this. We stared

wonderingly at Mary Elizabeth. Being shut in your room was a part of the state of not being grown up. When you grew up, you shut others in their rooms or let them out, as you ruled the occasion to require. There was Grandmother Beers, for instance, coming out the door with scissors in her hands and going toward her sweet-pea bed. Once she must have shut Mother in her room. Mother!

Delia was incurably a defender of things as they are. Whenever I am tempted to feel that guardians of an out-worn order must know better than they seem to know, I remember Delia. Delia was born reactionary, even as she was born brunette.

"Why," said she with finality, "that's the way they punish you."

Taken as a fact and not as a philosophy, there was no question about this.

"I was shut in one for pinching Frankie Ames," I acknowledged.

"I was in one for getting iron-rust on my skirt," said Calista, "and for being awful cross when my bath was, and for putting sugar on the stove to get the nice smell."

"I was in one for telling a lie," Betty admitted

reluctantly. "And Margaret Amelia was in one for wading in the creek. She was in a downstairs one. And I took a chair round outside to help her out — but she wouldn't do it."

"Pooh! I was in one lots of times," Delia capped it. And, as usual, we looked at her with respect as having experiences far transcending our own. "I'll be in one again if I don't go home and take care of my canary," she added. "Mamma said I would."

"Putting sugar on the stove isn't as wicked as telling a lie, is it?" Mary Elizabeth inquired.

We weighed it. On the whole, we were inclined to think that it was not so wicked, "though," Delia put in, "you do notice the sugar more."

"Why do they shut you in the same way for the different wickeds?" Mary Elizabeth demanded.

None of us knew, but it was Delia who had the theory.

"Well," she said, "you've *got* to know you're wicked. It don't make any difference how wicked. Because you stop anyhow."

"No, you don't," Betty said decidedly,

"you're always getting a new thing to be shut in about. Before you mean to," she added perplexedly.

Mary Elizabeth looked away at Grandmother Beers, snipping sweet-peas. Abruptly, Mary Elizabeth threw herself on the grass and stared up through the branches of the Eating Apple tree, and then laid her arms straight along her sides, and began luxuriously to roll down a little slope. The inquiry was too complex to continue.

"Let's go see if the horse-tail hair is a snake yet," she proposed, sitting up at the foot of the slope.

"I'll have to do my canary," said Delia, but she sprang up with the rest of us, and we went round to the rain-water barrel.

The rain-water barrel stood at the corner of the house, and reflected your face most satisfyingly, save that the eaves-spout got in the way. Also, you always inadvertently joggled the side with your knee, which set the water wavering and wrinkled away the image. At the bottom of this barrel invisibly rested sundry little "doll" pie-tins of clay, a bottle, a broken window-catch, a stray key, and the bowl of a

soap-bubble pipe, cast in at odd intervals, for no reason. There were a penny doll and a marble down there too, thrown in for sheer bravado and bitterly regretted.

Into this dark water there had now been dropped, two days ago, a long black hair from the tail of Mr. Branchett's horse, Fanny. We had been credibly informed that if you did this to a hair from a horse's tail and left it untouched for twenty-four hours or, to be *perfectly* safe, for forty-eight hours, the result would inevitably be a black snake. We had gone to the Branchetts' barn for the raw material and, finding none available on the floor, we were about to risk jerking it from the source when Delia had perceived what we needed caught in a crack of the stall. We had abstracted the hair, and duly immersed it. Why we wished to create a black snake, or what we purposed doing with him when we got him created, I cannot now recall. I believe the intention to have been primarily to see whether or not they had told us the truth — "they" standing for the universe at large. For my part, I was still smarting from having been detected sitting in patience with a handful of salt, by the mouse-

hole in the shed, in pursuance of another recipe which I had picked up and trusted. Now if this new test failed. . . .

We got an old axe-handle from the barn wherewith to probe the water. If, however, the black snake were indeed down there, our weapon, offensive and defensive, would hardly be long enough; so we substituted the clothes-prop. Then we drew cuts to see who should wield it, and the lot fell to Betty. Gentle little Betty turned quite pale with the responsibility, but she resolutely seized the clothes-prop, and Delia stood behind her with the axe-handle.

"Now if he comes out," said Betty, "run for your lives. He might be a blue racer."

None of us knew what a blue racer might be, but we had always heard of it as the fastest of all the creatures. A black snake, it seemed, might easily be a blue racer. As Betty raised the clothes-prop, I, who had instigated the experiment, weakened.

"Maybe he won't be ready yet," I conceded.

"If he isn't there, I'll never believe anything anybody tells me again — ever," said Delia firmly.

The clothes-prop Betty plunged to the bottom, and lifted. No struggling black shape writhed about it. She repeated the movement, and this time we all cried out, for she brought up the dark discoloured rag of a sash of the penny doll, the penny doll clinging to it and immediately dropping sullenly back again. Grown brave, Betty stirred the water, and Delia, advancing, did the same with her axe-handle. Again and again these were lifted, revealing nothing. At last we faced it: No snake was there.

"So that's a lie, too," said Delia, brutally.

We stared at one another. I, as the one chiefly disappointed, looked away. I looked down the street: Mr. Branchett was hoeing in his garden. Delivery wagons were rattling by. The butter-man came whistling round the house. Everybody seemed so busy and so *sure*. They looked as if they knew why everything was. And to us, truth and justice and reason and the results to be expected in this grown-up world were all a confusion and a thorn.

As we went round the house, talking of what had happened, our eyes were caught by a pic-

ture which should have been, and was not, of quite casual and domestic import. On the side-porch of Delia's house appeared her mother, hanging out Delia's canary.

"Good-bye," said Delia, briefly, and fared from us, running.

We lingered for a little in the front yard. In five minutes the curtains in Delia's room stirred, and we saw her face appear, and vanish. She had not waved to us — there was no need. It had overtaken her. She, too, was "in her room."

Delicacy dictated that we withdraw from sight, and we returned to the back yard. As we went, Mary Elizabeth was asking:

"Is telling a lie and not feeding your canary as wicked as each other?"

It seemed incredible, and we said so.

"Well, you get shut up just as hard for both of 'em," Mary Elizabeth reminded us.

"Then I don't believe any of 'em's wicked," said I, flatly. On which we came back to the garden and met Grandmother Beers, with a great bunch of sweet-peas in her hand, coming to the house.

"Wicked?" she said, in her way of soft

surprise. "I didn't know you knew such a word."

"It's a word you learn at Sunday school," I explained importantly.

"Come over here and tell me about it," she invited, and led the way toward the Eating Apple tree. And she sat down in the swing! Of course whatever difference of condition exists between your grandmother and yourself vanishes when she sits down casually in your swing.

My Grandmother Beers was a little woman, whose years, in England, in "New York state," and in her adopted Middle West, had brought her only peace within, though much had beset her from without. She loved Four-o'clocks, and royal purple. When she said "royal purple," it was as if the words were queens. She was among the few who sympathized with my longing to own a blue or red or green jar from a drug store window. We had first understood each other in a matter of window-sill food: This would be a crust, or a bit of baked apple, or a cracker which I used to lay behind the dining-room window-shutter — the closed one. For in the house at evening it was warm and

light and Just-had-your-supper, while outside it was dark and damp and big, and I conceived that it must be lonely and hungry. The Dark was like a great helpless something, filling the air and not wanting particularly to be there. Surely It would much rather be light, with voices and three meals, than the Dark, with nobody and no food. So I used to set out a little offering, and once my Grandmother Beers had caught me paying tribute.

"Once something *did* come and get it," I defended myself over my shoulder, and before she could say a word.

"Likely enough, likely enough, child," she assented, and did not chide me.

Neither did she chide me when once she surprised me into mentioning the Little Things, who had the use of my playthings when I was not there. It was one dusk when she had come upon me setting my toy cupboard to rights, and had commended me. And I had explained that it was so the Little Things could find the toys when they came, that night and every night, to play with them. I remember that all she did was to squeeze my hand; but I felt that I was wholly understood.

What child of us — of Us Who Were — will ever forget the joy of having an older one enter into our games? I used to sit in church and tell off the grown folk by this possibility in them — "She'd play with you — she wouldn't — she would — he would — they wouldn't" — an ancient declension of the human race, perfectly recognized by children, but never given its proper due. . . . I shall never forget the out-door romps with my Father, when he stooped, with his hands on his knees, and then ran *at* me; or when he held me while I walked the picket fence; or set me in the Eating Apple tree; nor can I forget the delight of the play-house that he built for me, *with a shelf around.* . . . And always I shall remember, too, how my Mother would play "Lost." We used to curl on the sofa, taking with us some small store of fruit and cookies, wrap up in blankets and shawls, put up an umbrella — possibly two of them — and there we were, lost in the deep woods. We had been crossing the forest — night had overtaken us — we had climbed in a thick-leaved tree — it was raining — the woods were infested by bears and wolves — we had a little food, possibly enough to stave off starva-

tion till daylight. Then came by the beasts of the forest, wonderful, human beasts, who passed at the foot of our tree, and with whom we talked long and friendly — and differently for each one — and ended by sharing with them our food. We scraped acquaintance with birds in neighbouring nests, the stars were only across a street of sky, the Dark did its part by hiding us. Sometimes, yet, when I see a fat, idle sofa in, say, an hotel corridor, I cannot help thinking as I pass: "What a wonderful place to play Lost." I daresay that some day I shall put up my umbrella and sit down and play it.

Well — Grandmother Beers was one who knew how to play with us, and I was always half expecting her to propose a new game. But that day, as she sat in the swing, her eyes were not twinkling at the corners.

"What does it mean?" she asked us. "What does 'wicked' mean?"

"It's what you aren't to be," I took the brunt of the reply, because I was the relative of the questioner.

"Why not?" asked Grandmother.

Why not? Oh, we all knew that. We

responded instantly, and out came the results of the training of all the families.

"Because your mother and father say you can't," said Betty Rodman.

"Because it makes your mother feel bad," said Calista.

"Because God don't want us to," said I.

"Delia says," Betty added, "it's because, if you are, when you grow up people won't think anything of you."

Grandmother Beers held her sweet-peas to her face.

"If," she said after a moment, "you wanted to do something wicked more than you ever wanted to do anything in the world — as much as you'd want a drink to-morrow if you hadn't had one to-day — and if nobody ever knew — would any of those reasons keep you from doing it?"

We consulted one another's look, and shifted. We knew how thirsty that would be. Already we were thirsty, in thinking about it.

"If I were in your places," Grandmother said, "I'm not sure those reasons would keep me. I rather think they wouldn't, — always."

We stared at her. It was true that they didn't

always keep us. Were not two of us "in our rooms" even now?

Grandmother leaned forward — I know how the shadows of the apple leaves fell on her black lace cap and how the pink sweet-peas were reflected in her delicate face.

"Suppose," she said, "that instead of any of those reasons, somebody gave you this reason: That the earth is a great flower — a flower that has never *really* blossomed yet. And that when it blossoms, life is going to be more beautiful than we have ever dreamed, or than fairy stories have ever pretended. And suppose our doing one way, and not another, makes the flower come a little nearer to blossoming. But our doing the other way puts back the time when it can blossom. *Then* which would you want to do?"

Oh, make it grow, make it grow, we all cried — and I felt a secret relief: Grandmother was playing a game with us, after all.

"And suppose that everything made a difference to it," she went on, "every little thing — from telling a lie, on down to going to get a drink for somebody and drinking first yourself out in the kitchen. Suppose that everything

made a difference, from hurting somebody on purpose, down to making up the bed and pulling the bed-spread tight so that the wrinkles in the blanket won't show. . . ."

At this we looked at one another in some consternation. How did Grandmother know. . . .

"Until after a while," she said, "you should find out that everything — loving, going to school, playing, working, bathing, sleeping, were all just to make this flower grow. Wouldn't it be fun to help?"

Yes. Oh, yes, we were all agreed about that. It would be great fun to help.

"Well, then suppose," said Grandmother, "that as you helped, you found out something else: That in each of you, say, where your heart is, or where your breath is, there was a flower trying to blossom too! And that only as you helped the earth flower to blossom could your flower blossom. And that your doing one way would make your flower droop its head and grow dark and shrivel up. But your doing the other way would make it grow, and turn beautiful colours — so that bye and bye every one of your bodies would be just a sheath for this flower. Which way *then* would you rather do?"

Oh, make it grow, make it grow, we said again.

And Mary Elizabeth added longingly:—

"Wouldn't it be fun if it was true?"

"It is true," said Grandmother Beers.

She sat there, softly smiling over her pink sweet-peas. We looked at her silently. Then I remembered that her face had always seemed to me to be somehow *light within*. Maybe it was her flower showing through!

"Grandmother!" I cried, "is it true — is it true?"

"It is true," she repeated. "And whether the earth flower and other people's flowers and your flower are to bloom or not is what living is about. And everything makes a difference. Isn't that a good reason for not being 'wicked'?"

We all looked up in her face, something in us leaping and answering to what she said. And I know that we understood.

"Oh," Mary Elizabeth whispered presently to Betty, "hurry home and tell Margaret Amelia. It'll make it so much easier when she comes out to her supper."

That night, on the porch alone with Mother

and Father, I inquired into something that still was not clear.

"But how can you *tell* which things are wicked? And which ones are wrong and which things are right?"

Father put out his hand and touched my hand. He was looking at me with a look that I knew — and his smile for me is like no other smile that I have ever known.

"Something will tell you," he said, "always."

"Always?" I doubted.

"Always," he said. "There will be other voices. But if you listen, something will tell you always. And it is all you need."

I looked at Mother. And by her nod and her quiet look I perceived that all this had been known about for a long time.

"That is why Grandma Bard is coming to live with us," she said, "not just because we wanted her, but because — *that* said so."

In us all a flower — and something saying something! And the earth flower trying to blossom. . . . I looked down the street: At Mr. Branchett walking in his garden, at the lights shining from windows, at the folk sauntering on the sidewalk, and toward town where

the band was playing. We all knew about this together then. *This* was why everything was! And there were years and years to make it come true.

What if I, alone among them all, had never found out?

XIV

KING

THERE was a certain white sugar bear and a red candy strawberry which we had been charged not to eat, because the strawberry was a nameless scarlet and the bear, left from Christmas, was a very soiled bear. We had all looked at these two things longingly, had even on occasion nibbled them a bit. There came a day when I crept under my bed and ate them both.

It was a bed with slats. In the slat immediately above my head there was a knot-hole. Knot-hole, slat, the pattern of the ticking on the mattress, all remain graven on the moment. It was the first time that I had actually been conscious of — indeed, had almost *heard* — the fighting going on within me.

Something was saying: "Oh, eat it, eat it. What do you care? It won't kill you. It may not even make you sick. It is good. Eat it."

And something else, something gentle, insistent, steady, kept saying over and over in

exactly the same tone, and so that I did not know whether the warning came from within or without: —

"It must not be eaten. It must not be eaten. It must not be eaten."

But after a little, as I ate, this voice ceased.

Nobody knew that I had eaten the forbidden bear and strawberry. Grandmother Beers squeezed my hand just the same. Mother was as tender as always. And Father—his kind eyes and some little jest with me were almost more than I could bear. I remember spending the evening near them, with something sore about the whole time. From the moment that it began to get dark the presence of bear and strawberry came and fastened themselves upon me, so that I delayed bed-going even more than usual, and interminably prolonged undressing.

Then there came the moment when Mother sat beside me.

"Don't ask God for anything," she always said to me. "Just shut your eyes and think of his lovingness being here, close, close, close — breathing with you like your breath. Don't ask him for anything."

But that night I scrambled into bed.

"Not to-night, Mother," I said.

She never said anything when I said that. She kissed me and went away.

Then!

There I was, face to face with it at last. What was it that had told me to eat the bear and the strawberry? What was it that had told me that these must not be eaten? What had made me obey one and not the other? Who was it that spoke to me like that?

I shut my eyes and thought of the voice that had told me to eat, and it felt like the sore feeling in me and like the lump in my throat, and like unhappiness.

I thought of the other gentle voice that had spoken and had kept speaking and at last had gone away — and suddenly, with my eyes shut, I was thinking of something like lovingness, close, close, breathing with me like my breath.

So now I have made a story for that night. It is late, I know. But perhaps it is not too late.

Once upon a time a beautiful present was given to a little boy named Hazen. It was not a tent or a launch or a tree-top house or a pretend aeroplane, but it was a little glass casket. And

it was the most wonderful little casket of all the kinds of caskets that there are.

For in the casket was a little live thing, somewhat like a fairy and somewhat like a spirit, and so beautiful that everyone wanted one too.

Now the little fairy (that was like a spirit) was held fast in the casket, which was tightly sealed. And when the casket was given to Hazen, the Giver said: —

"Hazen dear, until you get that little spirit free, you cannot be wise or really good or loved or beautiful. But after you get her free you shall be all four. And nobody can free her but you yourself, though you may ask anybody and everybody to tell you how."

Now Hazen's father was a king. And it chanced that while Hazen was yet a little boy, the king of a neighbour country came and took Hazen's father's kingdom, and killed all the court — for that was the way neighbour countries did in those days, not knowing that neighbours are nearly one's own family. They took little Hazen prisoner and carried him to the conquering king's court, and they did it in such a hurry that he had not time to take anything with him. All his belongings — his tops, his

football, his books, and his bank, had to be left behind, and among the things that were left was Hazen's little glass casket, forgotten on a closet shelf, upstairs in the castle. And the castle was shut up and left as it was, because the conquering king thought that maybe he might like sometime to give to his little daughter, the Princess Vista, this castle, which stood on the very summit of a sovereign mountain and commanded a great deal of the world.

In the court of the conquering king poor little Hazen grew up, and he was not wise or *really* good or loved or beautiful, and he forgot about the casket or thought of it only as a dream, and he did not know that he was a prince. He was a poor little furnace boy and kitchen-fire builder in the king's palace, and he slept in the basement and did nothing from morning till night but attend to drafts and dampers. He did not see the king at all, and he had never even caught a glimpse of the king's little daughter, the Princess Vista.

One morning before daylight Hazen was awakened by the alarm-in-a-basin at the head of his cot — for he was always so tired that just an alarm never wakened him at all, but set in

a brazen basin an alarm would waken *anybody*. He dressed and hurried through the long, dim passages that led to the kitchens, and there he kindled the fires and tended the drafts and shovelled the coal that should cook the king's breakfast.

Suddenly a Thought spoke to him. It said: —

"Hazen, you are not wise, or *really* good, or loved, or beautiful. Why don't you become so?"

"I," Hazen thought back sadly, "*I* become these things? Impossible!" and he went on shovelling coal.

But still the Thought spoke to him, and said the same thing over and over so many times that at last he was obliged to listen and even to answer.

"What would I do to be like that?" he asked almost impatiently.

"First go up in the king's library," said the Thought.

So when the fires were roaring and the dampers were right, Hazen went softly up the stair and through the quiet lower rooms of the palace, for it was very early in the morning, and no one was stirring. Hazen had been so seldom

above stairs that he did not even know where the library was and by mistake he opened successively the doors to the great banquet room, the state drawing rooms, a morning room, and even the king's audience chamber before at last he chanced on the door of the library.

The king's library was a room as wide as a lawn and as high as a tree, and it was filled with books, and the shelves were thrown out to make alcoves, so that the books were as thick as leaves on branches, and the whole room was pleasant, like something good to do. It was impossible for little Hazen, furnace boy though he was, to be in that great place of books without taking one down. So he took at random a big leather book with a picture on the cover, and he went toward a deep window-seat.

Nothing could have exceeded his surprise and terror when he perceived the window-seat to be occupied. And nothing could have exceeded his wonder and delight when he saw who occupied it. She was a little girl of barely his own age, and her lovely waving hair fell over her soft blue gown from which her little blue slippers were peeping. She, too, had a great book in her arms, and over the top of this she was

looking straight at Hazen in extreme disapproval.

"Will you have the goodness," she said — speaking very slowly and most *freezing* cold — "to 'splain what you are doing in my father's library?"

At these words Hazen's little knees should have shaken, for he understood that this was the Princess Vista herself. But instead, he was so possessed by the beauty and charm of the little princess that there was no room for fear. Though he had never in his life been taught to bow, yet the blood of his father the king, and of *his* father the king, and of *his* father the king, and so on, over and over, stirred in him and he bowed like the prince he was-but-didn't-know-it.

"Oh, princess," he said, "I want to be wise and *really* good and loved and beautiful, and I have come to the king's library to find out how to do it."

"Who are you, that want so many 'surd things?" asked the princess, curiously.

"I am the furnace boy," said the poor prince, "and my other name is Hazen."

At this the princess laughed aloud — for when he had bowed she had fancied that he might be

at least the servant to some nobleman at the court, too poor to keep his foot-page in livery.

"The furnace boy indeed!" she cried. "And handling my father's books. If you had what you 'serve, you'd be put in pwison."

At that Hazen bowed again very sadly, and was about to put back his book when footsteps sounded in the hall, and nursery governesses and chamberlains and foot-pages and lackeys and many whose names are as dust came running down the stairs, all looking for the princess. And the princess, who was not frightened, was suddenly sorry for little Hazen, who was.

"Listen," she said, "you bow so nicely that you may hide in that alcove and I will not tell them that you are there. But don't you come here to-morrow morning when I come to read my book, or I can't tell *what* will happen."

Hazen had just time to slip in the alcove when all the nursery governesses, chamberlains, foot-pages, and those whose names are as dust burst in the room.

"I was just coming," said the princess, haughtily.

But when she was gone, Hazen, in his safe alcove, did not once look at his big leather book.

He did not even open it. Instead he sat staring at the floor, and thinking and thinking and thinking of the princess. And it was as if his mind were opened, and as if all the princess thoughts in the world were running in, one after another.

Presently, when it was time for the palace to be awake, he stirred and rose and returned the book to its place, and in the midst of his princess thoughts he found himself face to face with a great mirror. And there he saw that, not only was he not beautiful, but that his cheek and his clothes were all blackened from the coal. And then he thought that he would die of shame; first, because the princess had seen him looking so, and second, because he looked so, whether she had seen him or not.

He went back to the palace kitchen, and waited only to turn off the biggest drafts and the longest dampers before he began to wash his face and give dainty care to his hands. In fact, he did this all day long and sat up half the night trying to think how he could be as exquisitely neat as the little princess. And at last when daylight came and he had put coal in the kitchen ranges and had left the drafts right and had taken another bath after, he

dressed himself in his poor best which he had most carefully brushed, and he ran straight back up the stair and into the king's library.

The Princess Vista was not there. But it was very, very early this time and the sun was still playing about outside, and so he set himself to wait, looking up at the window-seat where he had first seen her. As soon as the sun began to slant in the latticed windows in earnest, the door opened and the princess entered, her waving hair falling on her blue gown, and the little blue slippers peeping.

When she saw Hazen, she stood still and spoke most *freezing* cold.

"Didn't I tell you on no 'count to come here this morning?" she wished to know.

Generations of kings for ages back bowed in a body in little Hazen.

"Did your Highness not know that I would come?" he asked simply.

"Yes," said the princess to that, and sat down on the window-seat. "I will punish you," said she, "but you bow so nicely that I will help you first. Why do you wish to be wise?"

"I thought that I had another reason," said Hazen, "but it is because you are wise."

"I'm not so very wise," said the princess, modestly. "But I could make you as wise as I am," she suggested graciously. "What do you want to know?"

There was so much that he wanted to know! Down in the dark furnace room he had been forever wondering about the fires that he kindled, about the light that he did not have, about everything. He threw out his arms.

"I want to know about the whole world!" he cried.

The princess considered.

"Perhaps they haven't teached me everything yet," she said. "What do you want to know about the world?"

Hazen looked out the window and across the palace garden, lying all golden-green in the slow opening light, with fountains and flowers and parks and goldfish everywhere.

"What makes it get day?" he asked. For since he had been a furnace boy, Hazen had been taught nothing at all.

"Why, the sun comes," answered the princess.

"Is it the same sun every day?" Hazen asked.

"I don't think so," said the princess. "No — sometimes it is a red sun. Sometimes it is

a hot sun. Sometimes it is big, big, when it goes down. Oh, no. I am quite sure a different sun comes up every day."

"Where do they get 'em all?" Hazen asked wonderingly.

"Well," the princess said thoughtfully, "suns must be like cwort (she never could say "court") processions. I think they always have them ready somewheres. What else do you want to know about?"

"About the Spring," said Hazen. "Where does that come from? Where do they get it?"

"They never teached me that," said the princess, "but *I* think Summer is the mother, and Winter the father, and Autumn is the noisy little boy, and Spring is the little girl, with violets on."

"Of course," cried Hazen, joyfully. "I never thought of that. Why can't they talk?" he asked.

"They 'most can," said the princess. "Some day maybe I can teach you what they say. What else do you want to know?"

"About people," said Hazen. "Why are some folks good and some folks bad? Why is the king kind and the cook cross?"

"Oh, they never teached me that!" the princess cried impatiently. "What a lot of things you ask!"

"One more question, your Highness," said Hazen, instantly. "Why are you so beautiful?"

The princess smiled. "Now I'll teach you my picture-book through," she said.

She opened the picture-book and showed him pictures of castles and beasts and lawns and towers and ladies and mountains and bright birds and pillars and cataracts and wild white horses and, last, a picture of a prince setting forth on a quest. "Prince Living sets out to make his fortune," it said under the picture, and Hazen stared at it.

"Why shouldn't I set out to make *my* fortune?" he cried.

The princess laughed.

"You are a furnace boy," she explained. "*They* don't make fortunes. Who would mind the furnace if they did?"

Hazen sprang to his feet.

"That can't be the way the world is!" he cried. "Not when it's so pretty and all stuck full of goldfish and fountains and flowers and parks. If I went, I *would* make my fortune!"

The princess crossed her little slippered feet and looked at him. And when he met her eyes, he was ashamed of his anger, though not of his earnestness, and he bowed again; and all the kings of all the courts of his ancestors were in the bow.

"After all," said the princess, "we don't have the furnace in Summer. And you bow so nicely that I b'lieve I will help you to make your fortune. *Anyhow*, I can help you to set out."

Hazen was in the greatest joy. The princess bade him wait where he was, and she ran away and found somewhere a cast-off page boy's dress and a cap with a plume and a little silver horn and a wallet, with some bread. These she brought to Hazen just as footsteps sounded on the stairs, and nursery governesses and chamberlains and foot-pages and many whose names are as dust came running pell-mell down the stairs, all looking for the princess.

"Hide in that alcove," said the princess, "till I am gone. Then put on this dress and go out at the east gate which no one can lock. And as you go by the east wing, do not look up at my window or I will wave my hand and somebody may see you going. Now good-bye."

But at that Hazen was suddenly wretched.

"I can't leave *you!*" he said. "How can I leave *you?*"

"People always leave people," said the princess, with superiority. "Play that's one of the things I teached you."

At this Hazen suddenly dropped on one knee — the kings, his fathers, did that for him too — and kissed the princess's little hand. And as suddenly she wished very much that she had something to give him.

"Here," she said, "here's my picture-book. Take it with you and learn it through. *Now* good-bye."

And Hazen had just time to slip in the alcove when all the n. g.'s, c.'s, f. p.'s, and l.'s, whom there wasn't time to spell out, as well as all those whose names are now dust, burst in the room.

"I was just coming," said the princess, and went.

Hazen dressed himself in the foot-page's livery and fastened the wallet at one side and the little silver horn at the other, and put on the cap with a plume; and he stole into the king's garden, with the picture-book of the princess fast in his hand.

He had not been in a garden since he had left

his father's garden, which he could just remember, and to be outdoors now seemed as wonderful as bathing in the ocean, or standing on a high mountain, or seeing the dawn. He hastened along between the flowering shrubs and hollyhocks; he heard the fountains plashing and the song-sparrows singing and the village bells faintly sounding; he saw the goldfish and the water-lilies gleam in the pool and the horses cantering about the paddock. And all at once it seemed that the day was his, to do with what he would, and he felt as if already that were a kind of fortune in his hand. So he hurried round the east wing of the palace and looked up eagerly toward the princess's window. And there stood the Princess Vista, watching, with her hair partly brushed.

When she saw him, she leaned far out.

"I told you not to look," she said. "Somebody will see you going."

"I don't care if anyone does," cried Hazen. "I *had* to!"

"How fine you look now," the princess could not help saying.

"You are beautiful as the whole picture-book!" he could not help saying back.

"*Now*, good-bye!" she called softly, and waved her hand.

"Good-bye — oh, good-bye!" he cried, and waved his plumed cap.

And then he left her, looking after him with her hair partly brushed, and he ran out the east gate which was never locked, and fared as fast as he could along the king's highway, in all haste to grow wise and *really* good and loved and beautiful.

Hazen went a day's journey in the dust of the highway, and toward nightfall he came to a deep wood. To him the wood seemed like a great hospitable house, with open doors between the trees and many rooms through which he might wander at will, the whole fair in the light of the setting sun. And he entered the gloom as he might have entered a palace, expecting to meet someone.

Immediately he was aware of an old man seated under a plane tree, and the old man addressed him with: —

"Good even, little lad. Do you travel far?"

"Not very, sir," Hazen replied. "I am only going to find my fortune and to become wise, *really* good, beautiful, and loved."

"So!" said the old man. "Rest here a little and let us talk about it."

Hazen sat beside him and they talked about it. Now, I wish very much that I might tell you all that they said, but the old man was so old and wise that his thoughts came chiefly as pictures, or in other form without words, so that it was not so much what he said that held his meaning as what he made Hazen feel by merely being with him. Indeed, I do not know whether he talked about the stars or the earth or the ways of men, but he made little Hazen somehow know fascinating things about them all. And when time had passed and the dusk was nearly upon them, the old man lightly touched Hazen's forehead:—

"Little lad," he said, "have you ever looked in there?"

"In my own head?" said Hazen, staring.

"Even so," said the old man. "No? But that might well be a pleasant thing to do. Will you not do that, for a little while?"

This was the strangest thing that ever Hazen had heard. But next moment, under the old man's guidance, he found himself, as it were, turned about and seeing things that he had

never seen, and looking back into his own head as if there were a window that way. And he did it with no great surprise, for it seemed quite natural to him, and he wondered why he had never done it before.

Of the actual construction of things in there Hazen was not more conscious than he would have been of the bricks and mortar of a palace filled with wonderful music and voices and with all sorts of surprises. Here there were both surprises and voices. For instantly he could see a company of little people, *every one of whom looked almost like himself*. And it was as it is when one stands between two mirrors set opposite, and the reflections reflect the reflections until one is dizzy; only now it was as if all the reflections were suddenly to be free of the mirror and be little living selves, ready to say different things.

One little Self had just made a small opening in things, and several Selves were peering into it. Hazen looked too, and he saw to his amazement that it was a kind of picture of his plans for making his fortune. There were cities, seas, ships, men, forests, water-falls, leaping animals, glittering things, all the adventures that he had

been imagining. And the Selves were talking it over.

"Consider the work it will be," one was distinctly grumbling, "before we can get anything. *Is* it worth it?"

He was a discouraged, discontented-looking Self, and though he had Hazen's mouth, it was drooping, and though he had Hazen's forehead, it was frowning.

A breezy little Self, all merry and fluffy and light as lace, answered:—

"O-o-o-o!" it breathed. "I think it will be fun. That's all I care about it — it will be fun and *nothing else*."

Then a strange, fascinating Self, from whom Hazen could not easily look away, spoke, half singing.

"Remember the beauty that we shall see as we go — as we go," he chanted. "We can live for the beauty everywhere and for *nothing else*."

"Think of the things we shall learn!" cried another Self. "Knowledge — knowledge all the way — and *nothing else*."

Then a soft voice spoke, which was sweeter than any voice that Hazen had ever heard, and

the Self to whom it belonged looked like Hazen when he was asleep.

"Nay," it said sighing, "there are many dangers. But to meet dangers bravely and to overcome them finely is the way to grow strong."

At this a little voice laughed and cracked as it laughed, so that it sounded like something being broken which could never be mended.

"Being strong and wise don't mean making one's fortune," it said. "Just one thing means fortune, and that is being rich. To be rich — rich! That's what we want and it is all we want. And I am ready to fight with everyone of you to get riches."

Hazen looked where the voice sounded, and to his horror he saw a little Self made in his own image, but hideously bent and distorted, so that he knew exactly how he would look if he were a dwarf.

"Not me!" cried the breezy little Fun Self then. "You wouldn't fight me!"

"Yes, I would," said the dwarf. "I'd fight everybody, and when we were rich, you'd thank me for it."

"Ah, no," said the Knowledge Self. "I am the only proper ruler in this fortune affair.

Knowledge is enough for us to have. Knowledge is what we want."

"Beauty is all you need!" cried the fascinating Beauty Self. "I am the one who should rule you all."

"Well, rich, rich, rich! Do I not say so? Will not riches bring beauty and fun and leisure for knowledge?" said the dwarf. "Riches do it all. Do as I say. Take me for your guide."

"Strength is the thing!" said a great voice, suddenly. "We want to be big and strong and *nothing else*. I am going to rule in this." And the voice of the Strong Self seemed to be everywhere.

"Not without me . . . not without me!" said the Wise Self. But it spoke faintly, and could hardly be heard in the clamour of all the others who now all began talking at once, with the little Fun Self dancing among them and crying, "I'm the one — you all want me to rule, *really*, but you don't know it."

And suddenly, in the midst of all this, Hazen began to see strange little shadows appearing and lurking about, somewhat slyly, and often running away, but always coming back. They were tiny and faintly outlined — less like re-

flections in a mirror than like reflections which had not yet found a mirror for their home. And they spoke in thin little voices which Hazen could hear, and said: —

"We'll help you, Rich! We'll help you, Strength! We'll help you, Fun! Only let us be one of you and we'll help you win, and you shall reign. Here are Envy Self and Lying Self and Hate Self and Cruel Self — we'll help, if you'll let us in!"

And when he heard this, Hazen suddenly called out, with all his might: —

"Stop!" he cried, "I'm the ruler here! I'm Hazen!"

And of course he was the ruler — because it was the inside of his own head.

Instantly there was complete silence there, as when a bell is suddenly struck in the midst of whisperings. And all the Selves shrank back.

"Hazen!" they said, "we didn't know you were listening. You be king. We'll help — we'll help."

"As long as I live," said little Hazen then, "not one of you shall rule in here without me. I shall want many of you to help me, but only as much as I tell you to, and no more. I'm

only a furnace boy, but I tell you that I am king of the inside of my own head, and I'm going to rule here and nobody else!"

Then, nearer than any of the rest — and he could not tell just where it came from, but he knew how near it was — another voice spoke to him. And somewhat it was like the Thought that had spoken to him in the king's kitchen and bidden him go up to the king's library — but yet it was nearer than that had been.

"Bravely done, Hazen," it said. "Be king — be king, even as you have said!"

With the voice came everywhere sweet music, sounding all about Hazen and in him and through him; and everywhere was air of dreams — he could hardly tell whether he was watching these or was really among them. There were sweet voices, dim figures, gestures of dancing, soft colours, lights, wavy, wonderful lines, little stars suddenly appearing, flowers, kindly faces, and then one face — the exquisite, watching face of the Princess Vista at the window, with her hair partly brushed . . . and then darkness. . . .

. . . When he woke, it was early morning. The sun was pricking through the leaves of

the forest, the birds were singing so sweetly and swiftly that it was as if their notes overlapped and made one sound on which everything was threaded like curious and beautiful beads on a silver cord. The old man was gone; and before Hazen, the way, empty and green, led on with promise of surprise.

And now as he went forward, eating his bread and gathering berries, Hazen had never felt so able to make his future. It was as if he were not one boy but many boys in one, and they all ready to do his bidding. Surely, he thought, his fortune must lie at the first turn of the path!

But at the first turn of the path he met a little lad no older than himself, who was drawing a handcart filled with something covered, and he was singing merrily.

"Hello," said the Merry Lad. "Where are *you* going?"

"Nowhere in particular," said Hazen. And though he had readily confided to the old man what he was hoping to find, someway Hazen felt that if he told the Merry Lad, he would laugh at him. And that no one likes, though it is never a thing to fear.

"Come on with me," said the Merry Lad. "I

am going in the town to sell my images. There will be great sport."

And, without stopping to think whether his fortune lay that way, Hazen, whose blood leapt at the idea of the town and its sports, turned and went with him.

The Merry Lad was very merry. He told Hazen more games and riddles than ever he had heard. He sang him songs, did little dances for him in the open glades, raced with him, and when they reached the dusty highway, got him in happy talk with the other wayfarers. And by the time they gained the town, they were a gay little company. There the Merry Lad took his images to the market-place and spread them under a tree — little figures made to represent Mirth, Merriment, Laughter, Fun, Fellowship, and Delight — no end there was to the variety and charm of the little images, and no end to all that the Merry Lad did to attract the people to them. He sang and danced and whistled and even stood on his head, and everyone crowded about him and was charmed.

"Pass my cap about," he said, while he danced, to Hazen. "They will give us money."

So Hazen passed the Merry Lad's cap, and

the people gave them money. They filled the cap, indeed, with clinking coins, and went away carrying the images. And by nightfall the Merry Lad and Hazen had more money than they knew how to use.

"Oh," the Merry Lad cried, "we shall have a glorious time. Come!"

Now Hazen had never been in the town at night, and he had never been in any town at any time without some of the king's servants for whom he had had to fetch and carry. To him the streets were strange and wonderful, blazing with lights, filled with gayly dressed folk, and sounding now and again to strains of music. But the Merry Lad seemed wholly at home, and he went here and there like a painted moth, belonging to the night and a part of it. They feasted and jested and joyed, and most of all they spent the money that they had earned, and they spent it on themselves. I cannot tell you the things that they bought. They bought a wonderful, tropical, talking bird; they bought a little pony on which they both could ride, with the bird on the pony's neck; they bought a tiny trick monkey and a suit of Indian clothes with fringed leggings and head-feathers; and

a music-box that played like a whole band. And when the evening with its lights and pantomimes was over, they pitched their tent on the edge of the town, picketed the pony outside, brought the other things safely within, and lay down to sleep.

Now, since they had no pillows, Hazen took the picture-book which the princess had given him and made his pillow of that. And as soon as everything was quiet, and the Merry Lad and the talking bird were asleep and the pony was dozing at its picket, the princess's picture-book began to talk to Hazen. I do not mean that it said words — it is a great mistake to think that everything that is said must be said in words — but it talked to him none the less, and better than with words. It showed him the princess in her blue gown sitting in the window-seat with her little blue slippers crossed. It showed him her face as she taught him about the sun and the world, and taught him her picture-book through. It reminded him that his page-boy's dress was worn because, in his heart, he was her page. It brought back the picture of her standing at the window, with her hair partly brushed, to wave him a good-bye — "*Now*, good-bye," he

could hear her little voice. He remembered now that he had started out to find his fortune and to become wise, *really* good, loved, and beautiful. And lo, all this that he had done all day with the Merry Lad — was it helping him to any of these ?

As soon as he knew this, he rose softly and, emptying his pockets of his share of the money earned that day, he laid it near the Merry Lad's pillow, took the picture-book, and slipped away.

The Merry Lad did not wake, but the talking bird stirred on his perch and called after him : "Stay where you are ! Stay where you are !" And the words seemed to echo in Hazen's head and were repeated there as if another voice had said them, and while he hesitated at the door of the tent, he knew what that other voice was : It was within his head indeed, and it was the voice of that breezy little Self, all merry and fluffy and light as lace — the Fun Self itself !

And then he knew that all day long that was the voice that he had been obeying when he went with the Merry Lad, and all day long that Self had been guiding him, and had been his ruler. And he himself had not been king of the Selves at all !

Hazen slipped out into the night and ran as fast as he could. Nearly all that night he travelled without stopping, lest when day came the Merry Lad should overtake him. And when day did come, Hazen found himself far away, and passing the gate of a garden where, in the dawn, a youth was walking, reading a book. Him Hazen asked if he might come in the garden and rest for a little.

This Bookman, who was pleasant and gentle and seemed half dreaming, welcomed him in, and gave him fruit to eat, and Hazen fell asleep in the arbour. When he awoke, the Bookman sat beside him, still reading, and seeing that the boy was awake, he began reading to him.

He read a wonderful story about the elements of which everything in the world is made. He read that they are a great family of more than seventy, and so magically arranged that they make a music, done in octaves like the white keys of a piano. So that a man, if he is skilful, can play with these octaves as he might with octaves of sound, and with a thousand variations can make what he will, and almost play for himself a strain of the heavenly harmony in which things began. You see what wonderful

music that would be? Hazen saw, and he could not listen enough.

Until dark he was in the garden, eating fruit and listening; and the Bookman, seeing how he loved to listen, asked him if he would not stay on in the garden, and live there awhile. And without stopping to think whether his fortune lay that way, Hazen said that he would stay.

Everything that the Bookman read to him was like magic, and it taught Hazen to do wonderful things. For example, he learned marvellous ways with sentences and with words. The Bookman showed him how to get inside of words, as if they had doors, so that Hazen could look from out the words that were spoken almost as if they had been little boxes, and he inside. The Bookman showed him how to look behind the words on a page and to see how different they seemed that way. He would say a sentence, and instantly it would become solid, and he would set it up, and Hazen could hang to it, or turn upon it like a turning-bar. It was all great sport. For sentences were not the only things with which he could juggle. He showed Hazen how to think a thing and have *that* become solid in the air, too. Just as one

might think, "Now I will plant my garden," and presently there the garden is, solid; or, "Now I will get my lesson," and presently, sure enough, there the lesson *is*, in one's head, *so* the Bookman taught Hazen to do with nearly all his thoughts, making many and many of them into actions or else into a solid, so that it could be handled as a garden can.

And at last, one night, Hazen thought of the Princess Vista, hoping that that thought would become solid too, and that the princess would be there before him, for he wished very much to see her. But it did not do so, and he asked the Bookman the reason.

"Why does not my thought about the Princess Vista become solid, and the princess be here beside me?" he asked wistfully.

"Some thoughts take a very long time to become solid," said the Bookman, gently, "and sometimes we have to travel a long way to make them so. If you think of the princess long and hard enough, I daresay that you will go to her some day — and there she will be, solid."

But of course as soon as Hazen began thinking of the princess long and hard, he wanted, more than anything else in the world, to be doing

something that should hasten the time of seeing her, which could not well be until he had made his fortune. So thereupon he told the Bookman that he must be leaving the garden.

"I knew that the day must come," said the Bookman, sadly. "*Could* you not stay?"

And when he said that, Hazen wanted so very much to stay there in the enchantment of the place, that it seemed as if a voice in his own head were echoing the words. And while he hesitated at the gate of the garden, he knew what that other voice was! It was within his head indeed, and it was the voice of that strange, fascinating Self from which he had found that he could hardly look away — the Knowledge Self itself. And then he knew that all this time in this garden, it was this voice that he had been obeying and it had been guiding him. He himself had not been king of the Selves at all. So when he knew that, he hesitated not a moment, for he saw that although the Bookman was far finer than the Merry Lad, still neither must be king, but only he himself must be king.

"Alas!" he cried, as he left the garden, "I am not nearer to making my fortune now than I was at the beginning!"

XV

KING (*continued*)

So Hazen left the garden and the gentle Bookman, who was loath to let him go, and hurried out into the world again.

He travelled now for many days, hearing often of far countries which held what he sought, but never reaching any of them. Always he did what tasks came to his hand, for this seemed a a good way toward fortune. But sometimes the Envy Self and the Discontented Self spoke loudly in his head so that he thought that it was he himself who was speaking, and he obeyed them, and stopped his work, and until the chance to finish it was lost, he did not know that it was these Selves who had made him cease his task and lose his chance and be that much farther from fortune. For that was the way of all the Selves — they had a clever fashion of making Hazen think that their voices were his own voice, and sometimes he could hardly tell the difference.

At last, one night, he came to a hill, sloping

gently as if something beautiful were overflowing. Its trees looked laid upon the mellow west beyond. The turf was like some Titan woman's embroidery, sheared and flowered. Hazen looked at it all, and at the great sky and the welcoming distance, and before he knew whether it came as a thought or as a song, he had made a little rhyme :—

Do you wish you had a world of gold
With a turquoise roof on high,
And a coral east and a ruby west
And diamonds in the sky ?

Do you wish there were little doors of air
That a child might open wide,
Where were emerald chairs and a tourmaline rug
And a moonstone moon beside ?

Do you wish the lakes were silver plates
And the sea a sapphire dish ?
What a wonderful, wonderful world it is —
For haven't you got your wish ?

He liked to sing this, and he loved the hill and the evening. He lay there a long time, making

little rhymes and loving everything. Next day he wandered away in the woods, and asked for food at a hut, and offered the bewildered woman a rhyme in payment, and at night he returned to his hill, and there he lived for days, playing that he was living all alone in the world — that there was not another person anywhere on the earth.

But one night when he was lying on the hillside, composing a song to the Littlest Leaf in the Wood, suddenly the voice of his song was not so loud as a voice within him which seemed to say how much he delighted to be singing. And then he knew the voice — that it was the voice of the Beauty Self in his own head, that it was that voice that had made him linger on the hillside and had commanded him to sing about the beauty in the world *and to do nothing else*. And all this time it had been king of the Selves, and not he!

He rose and fled down the hillside, and for days he wandered alone, sick at heart because this fair Beauty Self had tricked him into following her *and no other*, even as the Fun Self and the Knowledge Self had done. But even while he wandered, grieving, again and again the Idle

Self, the Strong Self, the Discontented Self, deceived him for a little while and succeeded in making their own voices heard, and now and again the little shadowy Selves — the Malice and Cruel and Envy Selves drew very near him and tried to speak for him. And they all fought to keep him from being king and to deceive him into thinking that they spoke for him.

One brooding noonday, as Hazen was travelling, alone and tired, on the highroad, a carriage overtook him, and the gentleman within, looking sharply at him, ordered the carriage stopped, and asked him courteously if he was not the poet whose songs he had sometimes heard, and of whose knowledge and good-fellowship others had told him. It proved that it was no other than Hazen whom he meant, and he took him with him in his carriage to a great, wonderful house overlooking the valley, and commanding a sovereign mountain on whose very summit stood a deserted castle. It seemed as if merely looking on that wonderful prospect would help one to be wise and *really* good and beautiful and worthy to be loved.

At once Hazen's host, the Gentleman of the Carriage, began showing him his treasures and

all that made life for him. The house was filled with curious and beautiful things, pictures, ivories, marbles, and tapestries, and with many friends. In the evenings there were always festivities; mirth and laughter were everywhere, and Hazen was laden with gifts of these and other things, and delighted in the entertainment. But by day, in a high-ceiled library and a cool study, the two spent hours pouring over letters and science, finding out the secrets of the world, getting on the other side of words, saying sentences, and thinking thoughts that became solid; or they would wander on the hillsides and carry rare books and dream of the beauty in the world and weave little songs. Now they would be idle, now absorbed in feats of strength, and now they would descend into the town and there delight in its great sport. And in all this Hazen had some part and earned his own way, because of his cleverness and willingness to enter in the life and belong to it.

One day, standing on a balcony of the beautiful house, looking across at the mountain and the deserted castle, Hazen said aloud: —

"This is the true life. This is fortune. For now I hear all the voices of all my Selves, and I

give good things to each, and I am king of them all!"

But even as he spoke he heard another voice sounding within his own, and it laughed, and cracked as it laughed, so that it sounded like something being broken that could never be mended.

"I told you so, Hazen! I told you so!" it cried. "Being loved and *really* good do not mean making our fortune. Just one thing means fortune, and that is being rich. To be rich, *rich*, means good times and learning and beauty and idleness. I've fought everyone of the others, and now you've got all that they had to offer, because you have let me be king — *me and no other*."

To his horror, Hazen recognized the voice of the dwarf, the Riches Self, and knew that he was deceived again, that he himself was ruler of nothing, and that the dwarf was now king of all his Selves.

When he realized this, it seemed to Hazen that his heart was pierced and that he could not live any longer. Suppose — ah, suppose that he did get back to the Princess Vista now — what had he to take to her? Could he give her

himself — a Self of which not he but the dwarf was the owner ?

Somehow, in spite of their protestations and persuadings, Hazen said good-bye to them all, to his host and to those who had detained him, and he was off down into the valley alone — not knowing where he was going or what he was going to do, or what hope now remained that he should ever be any nearer the fortune for which he had so hopefully set out.

It was bright moonlight when he came to the edge of a fair, green, valley meadow. The whiteness was flooding the world, as if it would wash away everything that had ever been and would begin it all over again. And in the centre of the meadow, all the brightness seemed to gather and thicken and glitter, as if something mysterious were there. It drew Hazen to itself, as if it were so pure that it must be what he was seeking, and he broke through the hedge and stepped among the flowers of the lush grass, and he stood before it.

It was a fountain of water, greater than any fountain that Hazen had ever seen or conceived. It rose from the green in pure strands of exquisite firmness, in almost the slim lines and spirals

of a stair; and its high, curving spray and its plash and murmur made it rather like a gigantic white tree, with music in its boughs — the tree of life itself.

Hazen could no more have helped leaping in the fountain than he could have helped his joy in its beauty. He sprang in the soft waters as if he were springing into arms, and it drew him to itself as if he belonged to it. The waters flowed over him, and he felt purified, and as if a healing light had shone through him, body and mind.

But to his amazement, he did not remain in the fountain's basin. Gently, as if he were upborne by unseen hands, he mounted with the rise of the fountain, in its slim lines and spirals, until he found himself high above the meadow in a silvery tower that was thrown out from the fountain itself. And there, alone in that lofty silence, it was as if he were face to face with himself and could see his own heart.

Then the Thought spoke to him which had spoken to him long ago that morning in the king's kitchen, and again on that first night in the wood.

"Hazen!" it said, "you are not wise or *really*

good or loved or beautiful. Why don't you become so?"

"I!" said Hazen, sadly. "I have lost my chance. I came out to find my fortune and I have thrown it away."

But still the Thought spoke to him, and said the same thing over and over so many times that at last he answered:—

"What, then, must I do?" he asked.

And then he listened, there in the night and the stillness, to hear what it was that he must do. And this was the first time that ever he had listened like this, or questioned carefully his course. Always before he had done what seemed to him the thing that he wished to do, without questioning whether his fortune lay that way.

"Bravely spoken, Hazen," said the Thought, then. "Someone near is in great need. Find him and help him.

Instantly Hazen leaped lightly to the ground, and ran away through the moonlit meadow, and he sought as never in his life had he sought anything before, for the one near, in great need, whom he was to find and help. All through the night he sought, and with the setting of the

moon he was struggling up the mountain, because it seemed to him that he must do some hard thing, and this was hard. In the early dawn he stood on the mountain's very summit, and knocked at the gate of the deserted castle there. And it was the forsaken castle of his father, the king, whom the Princess Vista's father had conquered; but this Hazen did not know.

No sound answered his summons, so he swung the heavy gate on its broken hinges and stepped within. The court yard was vacant and echoing and grass-grown. Rabbits scuttled away at his approach, and about the sightless eyes of the windows, bats were clinging and moving. The clock in the tower was still and pointed to an hour long-spent. The whole place breathed of things forgotten and of those who, having loved them, were forgotten too.

Hazen mounted the broad, mossy steps leading to the portals, and he found one door slightly ajar. Wondering greatly, he touched it open, and the groined hall appeared like a grim face from behind a mask. On the stone floor, not far beyond the threshold, lay an old man, motionless. And when, uttering a little cry of

pity and amazement, Hazen stooped over him, he knew him at once to be that old man who had greeted him at the entrance to the wood on the evening of the day on which he himself had left the king's palace.

What with bringing him water and bathing his face and chafing his hands, Hazen at last enabled the old man to speak, and found that he had been nearly all his life-time the keeper of the castle and for some years its only occupant. He was not ill, but he had fallen and was hurt, and he had lain for several days without food. So Hazen, who knew well how to do it, kindled a fire of fagots in the great, echoing castle kitchen, and, from the scanty store which he found there, prepared broth and eggs, and then helped the old man to his bed in the little room which had once been a king's cabinet.

"Lad, lad!" said the old man, when he had remembered Hazen. "And have you found your fortune? And are you by now wise, *really* good, beautiful, and loved?"

"Alas!" said Hazen, only, and could say no more.

The old man nodded. "I know, I know,"

he said sadly. "The little Selves have been about, ruling here and ruling there. Is it not so? Sit here a little, and let us talk about it."

Then Hazen told him all that had befallen since that night when they sat together in the wood. And though his adventures seemed to Hazen very wonderful, the old man merely nodded, as if he were not hearing but only remembering.

"Ay," he said, at the last, "I have met them all — the Merry Lad, the Bookman, and all the rest, and have dwelt a space with some. And I, too, have come to the fountain in the night, and have asked what it was that I should do."

"But tell me, sir," said Hazen, eagerly, "how was it that I was told at the fountain that there was one near in great need. Did the fountain know you? Or did my Thought? And how could that be?"

"Nay, lad," said the old man, "but always, for everyone, there is someone near in need — yet. One has only to look."

Then he talked to Hazen more about his fortune, and again the old man's meaning was in his mere presence, so that whether he talked

about the stars or the earth or the ways of men, he made Hazen know fascinating things about them all. And now Hazen listened far differently from the way that he had listened that other time when they had talked, and it was as if the words had grown, and as if they meant more than once they had meant.

Now, whoever has stood for the first time in a great, empty castle knows that there is one thing that he longs to do above all other things, and this is to explore. And when the afternoon lay brooding upon the air, and slanting sun fell through the dusty lattices, Hazen asked the old man eagerly if he might wander through the rooms.

"As freely," answered the old man, willingly, "as if you were the castle's prince."

Thus it chanced that, after all the years, Hazen, though he was far from dreaming the truth, was once more roaming through the rooms of his birthplace and treading the floors that had once echoed the step of his father, the king.

It was a wonderful place, the like of which Hazen thought he had never seen before, save only in the palace of the father of the princess.

Above stairs the rooms had hardly been disturbed since that old day of the hurried flight of all his father's court. There was a great room of books, as rich in precious volumes as the king's library which he already knew, and there, though this he could not guess, his own father had been wont to sit late in the night, consulting learned writers and dreaming of the future of his little son. There was the chapel, where they had brought Hazen himself to be christened, in the presence of all the court; there the long banqueting room to which he had once been carried so that the nobles might pledge him their fealty, the arched roof echoing their shouts. The throne room, the council room, the state drawing rooms — through all these, with their dim, dusty hangings and rich, faded furnishings, Hazen footed; and at last, up another stair, he came to the private apartments of the king and queen themselves.

Breathing the life of another time the rooms lay, as if partly remembering and partly expecting. In the king's room was the hunting suit that he had thrown off just before the attack, the book that he had been reading, the chart that he had consulted. In the queen's

room were tarnished golden toilet articles and ornaments, and in her wardrobe her very robes hung, dusty and mouldering, the gold thread and gold fringes showing black and sad.

And then Hazen entered a room which seemed to have been a child's room — and it was his room, of his first babyhood. Something in him stirred and kindled, almost as if his body remembered, though his mind could not do so. Toys lay scattered about — tops, a football, books, and a bank. The pillow of the small white bed was indented as if from the pressure of a little head, and a pair of tiny shoes, one upright, one overturned, were on the floor. Hazen picked up one little shoe and held it for a minute in his hand. He wondered if some of the little garments of the child, whoever he was, might not be in the hanging room. And he opened the closed door.

The door led to a closet and, as he had guessed, little garments were hanging there. But it was not these that caught his eye and held him breathless and spellbound on the threshold. On the high shelf of the closet stood a small glass casket. And in the casket was a little bit of live thing that fluttered piteously, as if beg-

ging to be released, and frantic with joy at the coming of light from without.

Hazen's heart beat as he took the casket in his hand. It was the most wonderful little box that ever he had seen. And the little living thing was something like a fairy and something like a spirit and so beautiful that it seemed to Hazen that he must have it for his own. Something stirred and kindled in his mind so that it was almost a memory, and he said to himself: —

"I have seen a casket like this. I have *had* a casket like this. Nay, but the very earliest thing that ever I can remember is a casket like this from which no one knew how to release this little living spirit."

For the little spirit was fast in the crystal prison, and if one broke the casket, one would almost certainly harm the spirit — but what other way was there to do?

With the casket in his hand and the little spirit fluttering within, Hazen ran back below stairs to the old man.

"Look!" Hazen cried. "This casket! It is from the closet shelf of some child's room. I remember a casket such as this, and within it

a little living spirit. I have *had* a casket such as this! What does it mean?"

Then the old man, who had been keeper there when the castle was taken, trembled and peered into Hazen's face.

"Who are you?" the old man cried. "Who are you — and what is your name?"

"Alas," said Hazen, sadly, "I was but the furnace boy to the king of a neighbouring country, and who I am I do not know. But as for my name, that is Hazen, and I know not what else."

Then the old man cried out, and tried to bow himself, and to kiss Hazen's hand.

"Prince Hazen!" cried he. "You are no other. Ah, God be praised. You are the son of my own beloved king."

As well as he could for his joy and agitation, the old man told Hazen everything: how the castle had been taken by that king of a neighbour country — who did *not* know that neighbours are nearly one's own family — how Hazen had been made prisoner, and how he was really heir to this kingdom and to all its ample lands. And how the magic casket, which after all these years the old man now remembered, was to make Hazen, and no other, wise and *really* good and

loved and beautiful, if only the little spirit could be freed.

"But how am I to do that?" Hazen cried. "For to break the casket would be to harm the spirit. And what other way is there to do?"

"Alas," answered the old man, "that I do not know. I think that this you must do alone. As for me, my life is almost spent. And now that I have seen you, my prince, the son of my dear sovereign, there is left to me but to die in peace."

At this, Hazen, remembering how much he owed the wonderful old man for that enchanted talk in the wood, when he had taught him fascinating things about the stars and the earth and the ways of men, and had shown him the inside of his own head and all those Selves of his and he their king if he would be so — remembering all these things Hazen longed to do something for him in return. But what could he do for him, he the heir of a conquered kingdom and a desolate palace? Yet the old man had been his father's servant; and it was he whom the Thought at the fountain had bidden him to help; but chiefly Hazen's heart overflowed with simple pity and tenderness for the

helpless one. And in that pity the Thought spoke again : —

"Give him the casket," it said.

Hazen hesitated — and in an instant his head was a chaos of voices. It was as if all the little Selves, even those which had now long been silent, were listening, were suddenly fighting among themselves in open combat to see what they could make Hazen do.

"That beautiful thing!" cried the Beauty Self. "Keep it — keep it, Hazen!"

" You will never have another chance at a fortune if you give it up!" cried the Discontented Self.

"If you throw away your chance at a fortune, your life will be a life of hard work — and where will your good time come in?" cried the little Fun Self, anxiously.

"You will have only labour and no leisure for learning —" warned the Knowledge Self.

"What of the Princess Vista? Do you not owe it to her to keep the casket? And is it not *right* that you should keep the casket and grow wise and *really* good and loved and beautiful?" they all argued in turn. And above them all sounded the terrible, cracked voice of

the dwarf, not laughing now, but fighting for his life :—

"Fool! Nothing counts but your chance at fortune. If you part with the casket, you part with *me!*"

But sweet and clear through the clamour sounded the solemn insisting of the Thought :—

"Give him the casket — give him the casket, Hazen."

Quickly Hazen knelt beside the old man, and placed the magic casket in his hands.

"Lo," said Prince Hazen, "I have nothing to give you, save only this. But it may be that we can yet find some way to release the spirit and that then you can have the good fortune that this will give. Take the casket — it is yours."

In an instant, and noiselessly, the magic casket fell in pieces in Hazen's hands, and vanished. And with a soft sound of escaping wings the little spirit rose joyously and fluttered toward Hazen, and alighted on his breast. There were sudden sweetness and light in all the place, and a happiness that bewildered Hazen — and when he looked again, the little spirit had disappeared — but his own breast was filled with

something new and marvellous, as if strange doors to himself had opened, and as if the spirit had found lodging there forever.

In the clear silence following upon the babel of the little voices of all the mean and petty Selves, Hazen was aware of a voice echoing within him like music; and he knew the Thought now better than he knew himself, who had so many Selves, and he knew that when it spoke to him softly, softly, he would always hear.

"If you had kept the magic casket for yourself," it said, "the spirit would have drooped and died. *It was only by giving the casket away that the spirit could ever be free.* It was only when the spirit became yours that you could hope to be wise and good and beautiful and worthy to be loved. And now where is the Princess Vista's picture-book?"

All this time Hazen had not lost the picture-book of the princess, and now it was lying on the floor near where he was that night to have slept. He caught it up and turned the pages, and the old familiar pictures which the princess had shown him that morning in the window-seat made him long, as he had not longed since he had left the palace, to see her again.

He turned to the old man.

"There is a certain princess —" he began.

"Ay," said the old man, gently, "so there is always, my prince. Go to her."

The mere exquisite presence of that spirit in the room seemed to have healed and invigorated the old man, and he had risen to his feet, clothed with a new strength. He set about searching in the king's wardrobe for suitable garments for his young prince, and in a cedar chest he found vestments of somewhat ancient pattern, but of so rich material and so delicately made that the ancient style did but add to their beauty.

When he had made Hazen ready, there was never a fairer prince in the world. Then the old man led him below stairs and showed him in a forgotten room, of which he himself only had the key, a box containing the jewels of the queen, his mother. So, bearing these, save one with which he purchased a horse for his needs, Prince Hazen set out for the palace of the princess.

It chanced that it was early morning when Prince Hazen entered the palace grounds which he had left as a furnace boy. And you must

know that, since his leaving, years had elapsed; for though he had believed himself to have stayed with the Merry Lad but one day, and with the Bookman but a few days, and but a little time on the hills singing songs, and in byways listening to the voices of Idleness, Strength, and the rest, and lingering in that fair home where the Dwarf had sent him, yet in reality with each one he had spent a year and more, so that now he was like someone else.

But the princess's father's palace garden was just the same, and Hazen entered by the east gate, which still no one could lock; and to be back within the garden was as wonderful as bathing in the ocean or standing on a high mountain or seeing the dawn. His horse bore him along between the flowering shrubs and the hollyhocks; he heard the fountains plashing and the song-sparrows singing and the village bells faintly sounding; he saw the goldfish and the water-lilies gleam in the pool, and the horses cantering about the paddock. And all at once it seemed to him that the day was his and the world was his, to do with them what he would.

So he galloped round the east wing of the

palace, and looked up eagerly and longingly toward the princess's window. And there stood the Princess Vista, watching. But when she saw him, she drew far back as if she were afraid. And Prince Hazen, as he bowed low in his saddle, could think of no word to say to her that seemed a word to be said. He could only cry up to her: —

"Oh, Princess Vista. Come down! Come down! Come down — and teach me about the whole world."

He galloped straight to the great entrance way, and leaped from his horse, and no one questioned him, for they all knew by his look that he came with great authority. And he went to the king's library, to that room which was as wide as a lawn and as high as a tree, and filled with mystery, and waited for her, knowing that she would come.

She entered the room almost timidly, as, once upon a time, the little furnace boy had entered. And when she saw him waiting for her before the window-seat, nothing could have exceeded her terror and her wonder and her delight. And now her eyes were looking down, and she did *not* ask him what he was doing there.

"Oh, Princess Vista," he said softly, "I love you. I want to be loved!"

"Who are you — that want so much?" the princess asked — but her eyes knew, and her smile knew.

"Someone who has brought back your picture-book," said Prince Hazen. "I pray you, teach it to me again."

"Nay," said the princess, softly, "I have taught you a wrong thing. For I have taught you that there are many suns. And instead there is only one sun, and it brings only one day — and that day is this day!"

It was so that she welcomed him back.

They went to the king, her father, and told him everything. And when he knew that his daughter loved Prince Hazen, he restored his kingdom to him, and named him his own successor. And Hazen was crowned king, with much magnificence, and his father's courtiers, who were living, were returned to his court, and that wise, wonderful old man, who had shown him the inside of his own head, was given a place of honour near the king.

But on the day of the coronation, louder than the shouts of the people, and nearer even than

the voice of his queen, sounded that voice of the wise and good Self, which was but the Thought, deep within the soul of the king: —

"Hail to Hazen — King of All His Selves!"

XVI

THE WALK

"WHAT's the latest you ever stayed up?" Delia demanded of Mary Elizabeth and me.

"I sat up till ten o'clock once when my aunt was coming," I boasted.

"Once I was on a train that got in at twelve o'clock," said Mary Elizabeth, thoughtfully, "but I was asleep till the train got in. Would you call that sitting up till twelve o'clock?"

On the whole, Delia and I decided that you could not impartially call it so, and Mary Elizabeth conceded the point. Her next best experience was dated at only half past nine.

"I was up till eleven o'clock lots of times." Delia threw out carelessly.

We regarded her with awe. Here was another glory for her list. Already we knew that she had slept in a sleeping car, patted an elephant, and swum four strokes.

"What's the earliest you ever got up?" Delia pursued.

Here, too, we proved to have nothing to compete with the order of Delia's risings. However, this might yet be mended. There seemed never to be the same household ban on getting up early that there was on staying up late.

"Let's get up some morning before four o'clock and take a walk," I suggested.

"My brother got up at half past three once," Mary Elizabeth announced.

"Well," I said, "let's get up at half past three. Let's do it to-morrow morning."

Mary Elizabeth and I had stretched a string from a little bell at the head of her bed to a little bell at the head of my bed. This the authorities permitted us to ring so long as there was discernible a light, or any other fixed signal, at the two windows; and also after seven o'clock in the morning. But of course the time when we both longed most frantically to pull the cord was when either woke at night and lay alone in the darkness. In the night I used to put my hand on the string and think how, by a touch, I could waken Mary Elizabeth, just as if she were in my room, just as if we were hand in hand. I used to think what joy it would be if all little children on the same side

of the ocean were similarly provided, and if no one interfered. A little code of signals arose in my mind, a kind of secret code which should be heard by nobody save those for whom they were intended — for sick children, for frightened children, for children just having a bad dream, for motherless children, for cold or tired or lonely children, for all children sleepless for any cause. I used to wish that little signals like this could be rung for all unhappy children, night or day. Why, with all their inventions, had not grown people invented this? Of course they would never make things any harder for us than they could help (we thought). But why had they not done this thing to make things easier?

The half past three proposal was unanimously vetoed within doors: We might rise at five o'clock, no earlier. This somewhat took edge from the adventure, but we accepted it as next best. Delia was to be waked by an alarm clock. Mary Elizabeth and I felt that, by some mysterious means, we could waken ourselves; and we two agreed to call each other, so to say, by the bells.

When I did waken, it was still quite dark, and when I had found light and a clock, I saw that it

was only a little after three. As I had gone to bed at seven, I was wide awake at three; and it occurred to me that I would stay up till time to call Mary Elizabeth. This would be at half past four. Besides, stopping up then presented an undoubted advantage: It enabled me to skip my bath. Clearly I could not, with courtesy, risk rousing the household with many waters.

I dressed in the dark, braided my own hair in the dark — by now I could do this save that the plait, when I brought it over my shoulder, still would assume a jog — and sat down by the open window. It was one of the large nights . . . for some nights are undeniably larger than others. When I was on the street with my hand in a grown-up hand, the night was invariably bounded by trees, fences, houses, lawns, horse-blocks, and the like. But when I stepped to the door alone at night, I always noticed that it stretched endlessly away. So it was now. I could slip out the screen, as I had discovered earlier in the season when I had felt the need of feeding a nest of house-wrens in the bird-house below my sill — and I took out the screen now, and leaned out in the darkness. The stars seemed very near — I am always glad that I

did not know how far away they are, for they looked so friendly near. If only, I used to think, the clouds would form *behind* the stars and leave them all shiny and blurry bright in the rain. What were they? How came they to be in our world's sky?

I suppose that I had been ten minutes at the window that morning when I saw a light briefly flash in Mary Elizabeth's window. Instantly, I softly pulled my bell. She answered, and then I could see her, dim in the window once more dark.

"It isn't time yet!" she called softly — our houses were very near.

"Not yet," I answered, "but I'm going to stay up."

Mary Elizabeth briefly considered this.

"What for?" she propounded.

I had not thought what for.

"To — why to be up early," I answered confidently. "I'm all dressed."

The defence must have carried conviction.

"I will, too," Mary Elizabeth concluded.

She disappeared and, after a suitable time, reappeared at the window, presumably fully clothed. I detached the bell from my bed and

sat with it in my hand, and I found afterward that she had done the same. From time to time we each gave the cord a slight, ecstatic pull. The whole mystery of the great night lay in those gentle signals.

It is unfortunate to have to confess that, after a time, the mystery palled. But it did. Stars, wide, dark, moonless lawn, empty street, all these blurred and merged in a single impression. This was one of chilliness. Even calling through the night at intervals, and at the imminent risk of being heard, lost its charm, because after a little while there was nothing left to call. "How still it is!" and "Nobody but us is up in town," and "Won't Delia be mad?" lose their edge when repeated for about the third time each. Moreover, I was obliged to face a new foe: I was getting sleepy.

Without undue disturbance of the cord, I managed to consult the clock once more. It was five minutes of four. There remained more than an hour to wait! It was I who capitulated.

"Mary Elizabeth," I said waveringly, "would you care very much if I was to lay down just a little to rest my eyes?"

"No, I wouldn't care," came with significant alacrity. "I will, too."

I lay down on the covers and pulled a comforter about me. As I drifted off I remember wondering how the dark ever kept awake all night. For it was awake. To know that one had only to listen.

We all had a signal which we called a "trill," made by tongue and teeth, with almost the force of a boy and a blade of grass. This, produced furiously beneath my window, was what wakened me. Delia stood between the two houses, engaged with such absorption in manufacturing this sound that she failed to see me at the window. A moment after I had hailed her, Mary Elizabeth appeared at her window, looking distinctly distraught.

Seeing us fully dressed, Delia's indignation increased.

"Why didn't you leave me know you were up?" she demanded shrilly. "It's a quarter past five. I been out here fifteen minutes."

We were assuring her guiltily that we would be right down when there came an interruption.

"*Delia!*"

Delia's father, in a gray bath-robe, stood at an upper window of their house across the street.

"What do you mean by waking up the whole

neighbourhood?" he inquired, not without reason. "Now I want you to come home."

"We were going walking," Delia reminded him.

"You are coming home at once after this proceeding," Delia's father assured her. "No more words please, Delia."

He disappeared from the window. Delia moved reluctantly across the street. As she went, she threw a resentful glance at Mary Elizabeth and me, each.

"I'm sorry, Delia!" we called softly in chorus. She made no reply. Mary Elizabeth and I were left staring at each other down our bell-rope, no longer taut, but limp, as we had left it earlier. . . . Even in that stress, the unearthly sweetness of the morning smote me — the early sun, the early shadows. It all looked so exactly as if it had expected you not to be looking. This is the look of outdoors that, *now*, will most quickly take me back.

"It wouldn't be fair to go walking without Delia," said Mary Elizabeth, abruptly and positively.

"No," I agreed, with equal decision. Then, "We might as well go back to bed," I pursued the subject further.

"Let's," said Mary Elizabeth.

XVII

THE GREAT BLACK HUSH

On that special night, which somehow I remember with tenderness, I sometimes think now — all these years after — that I should like to have been with those solitary, sleepy little figures, trying so hard to get near to mystery. I should think that a Star Story must have come in anybody's head to tell them. Like this: —

Once, when it didn't matter to anybody whether you were late or early, or quick or slow, not only because there wasn't anybody and there wasn't any you, but because it was back in the beginning when there were no lates and earlies and quicks and slows, *then* things began to happen in the middle of the Great Black Hush which was all there was to everything.

The Great Black Hush reached all the way around the Universe and in directions without any names, and it was huge and humble and

superior and helpless and mighty and in other ways it was very much indeed like a man. And as there was nothing to do, the Great Black Hush was bored past extinction and almost to creation. For there wasn't anything else about save only the Wind, and the Wind would have nothing whatever to do with him and always blew right by.

Now, inasmuch as everything that is now was then going to be created, it was all waiting somewhere to be created; and nothing is clearer than that. Lines and colours and musics and tops and blocks and flame and Noah's arks and mechanical toys and mountains and paints and planets and air and water and alphabets and jumping-jacks, all, all, were waiting to be created, and among them waited people. I cannot tell you where they waited, because there was no where; but they were waiting, as anybody can see, for time to be begun.

Among the people who were waiting about was one special baby, who was just big enough to reach out after everything and to try to put it in his mouth, and they had an awful time with him. He put his little hands on coloured things and on flame things and on air and on water and

"To see what running away is really like."

on musics, and he wanted to know what they all were, and he tried to put them in his mouth. And his mother was perfectly distracted, and she told him so, openly.

"Special Baby," she said to him openly, "I don't see why every hair in my head is not pure white. And if you don't stop making so much trouble, I'll run away."

"Run away," thought the Special Baby. "Now what thing is that?"

And he stretched out his little hand to see, but there wasn't anything there, and he couldn't put it in his mouth; so without letting anybody know, he started off all by himself to see what running away is really like.

He ran and he ran, past lines and colours and blocks and flame and music and paint and planets, all waiting about to begin, till he began to notice the Great Black Hush, where it lay all humble and important, and bored past extinction and almost to creation.

"What thing is that?" thought the Special Baby, and put out his little hand to get it and put it in his mouth.

So he touched the Great Black Hush, and under the little hand the Great Black Hush felt as

never he had felt before. For the Special Baby's hand was soft and wandering and most clinging — any General Baby's hand will give you the idea if you care to try. And it made it seem as if there were something to do.

All through his huge, helpless, superior, and mighty being the Great Black Hush was stirred, and when the Special Baby was frightened and would have gone back, the Great Black Hush did the most astonishing things to try to keep him. He plaited the darkness up like a ruffle and waved it like a flag and opened it like a flower and shut it like a door and poured it about like water, all to keep the Special Baby amused. But though the Special Baby tried to put most of these and *all* the dark in his mouth, still on the whole he was badly frightened and wanted his mother, and he began to cry to show how much he wanted her. And then the Great Black Hush was at his wits' end.

"Now, who is there to be the mother of this Special Baby?" he cried in despair, for there wasn't anything else anywhere around, save only the Wind, and the Wind always blew right by. But the blowing by must have been because the Great Black Hush had never spoken before,

for these were the first words that ever he had said; and the Wind, on hearing them, stopped still as a stone, and listened.

"Would I do?" the Wind asked, and the Great Black Hush was so astonished that he almost dropped the Special Baby.

"Would I do?" asked the Wind again, and made the dark like blown garments and like long, blown hair and tender motions, such as women make. And she took the Special Baby in her arms and rocked him as gently as boughs, so that he laughed with delight and tried to put the wind in his mouth and finally went to sleep, with his beads on.

"*Now* what'll we do?" said the Great Black Hush, hanging about, all helpless and mighty.

"We can get along without a cradle," said the Wind, "because I will rock him to sleep in my arms." (This was before time began and before they laid them down to go to sleep alone in a dark room.) "But we ought, we *ought*," she added, "to have something for him to play with when he wakes up." (This was before time began and before anybody ate. But they always played. That came first.)

"If he had something to play with, what would

that look like?" asked the Great Black Hush, all helpless.

"It musn't have points like scissors, or ends like string, and the paint mustn't come off. I think," said the Wind, "it ought to look like a shining ball."

"By my distance," said the Great Black Hush, all mighty, "that's what it shall look like."

Then he began to make a plaything, and he worked all over him and all over everywhere at the fashioning. I don't know how he did it, because I wasn't there, and I can't reckon how long it took him, because there wasn't any time, but I know some things about it all, and one is that he finally got it done.

"Look!" the Great Black Hush cried to the Wind, — for she paid more attention to the Special Baby now than she did to him. And when she looked, there hung in the sky, a great, enormous, shining ball.

"That's big enough so he can't get it in his mouth," she said approvingly. "It's really ginginatic."

"You mean gigantic, dear," said the Great Black Hush, all superior. But the Wind didn't care because words hadn't been used long enough

to fit closely, and besides he had said "dear" and she knew what *that* meant. "Dear" came before "gigantic."

"Now wake him up," said the Great Black Hush, "to play with it."

But this the Wind would by no means do. She said the Special Baby must have his sleep out or he'd be cross. And the Great Black Hush wondered however she knew that, and he went away, all humble, and amused himself making more playthings till the baby woke up. And all the playthings looked like shining balls, because that was the only kind of plaything the Wind had told him to make and he didn't know whether anything else would do. So he made them by the thousands and started them all swinging because he thought the Special Baby would like them to do that.

By-and-by — there was always by-and-by before there was any time, and that is why so many people prefer it — when he couldn't stay any longer, he went back where the Wind waited, cuddling the Special Baby close.

"Sh-h-h-h," said the Wind, but she was too late, and the Special Baby woke up, with wide eyes and a smile in them.

But he wasn't cross. For the minute he opened his eyes he saw all the thousands of shining balls hanging in the darkness and swinging, swinging, and he crowed with delight and stretched out his little hands for them, but they were so big he couldn't put them in his mouth and so he might reach out all he pleased.

"*Ho*," said the Great Black Hush, "now everything is as it never was before."

But the Wind sighed a little.

"I wish everything were more so," she said. "I ought to have a place to take the Special Baby and make his clothes and mend his socks and tie on his shoes and rub his little back. Also, I want to learn a lullaby, and this is so public."

Then the Great Black Hush thought and thought, and remembered that away back on the Outermost Way and beneath the Wild Wing of Things, there was a tidy little place that might be just the thing. It was *not* up to date, because there wasn't any date, but still he thought it might be just the thing.

"By the welkin," he said, "I know a place that is the place. I'll go and sweep it out."

"Not so fast," said the Wind, gently. "I go

also. I want to be sure that there are enough closets —" or whatever would have corresponded to that before there was any Modern at all.

So the three went away together and groped about on the Outermost Way and beneath the Wild Wing of Things, and there the Wind swept it out tidily and there they made their home. And when it was all done, — which took a great while because the Wind kept wanting additions put on, — they came out and sat at the door of the place, the Great Black Hush and the Wind and the Special Baby between.

And as they did that a wonderful thing was true. For now that the Great Black Hush had withdrawn to his new home, lo, all the swinging plaything balls were shining through space, and there was light. And the man and the woman and the child at the door of the first home looked in one another's faces. And the man and the woman were afraid of the light and their look clung each to the other's in that fear; but the Special Baby stretched out his little hands and tried to put the light in his mouth.

"Don't, dear," said the woman, and her voice sounded quite natural.

"Pay attention to me and not to the Baby,"

said the man, and *his* voice sounded quite natural, and very mighty, so that the woman obeyed — until the Special Baby wanted her again.

And that was when she made her lullaby, and it was the first song: —

WIND SONG*

Horn of the morning!
And the little night pipings fail.
The day is launched like a hollow ship
With the sun for a sail.
The way is wide and blue and lone
With all its miles inviolate
Save for the swinging stars we've sown
And a thistle of cloud remote and blown.
Oh, I passion for something nearer than these!
How shall I know that this live thing is I
With only the morning for proof and the sky?
I long for a music more soft to its keys,
For a touch that shall teach me the new sureties.
Give me some griefs and some loyalties
And a child's mouth on my own!

Lullaby, lullaby,
Babe of the world, swing high,
Swing low.

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I am a mother you never may know,
But oh
And oh, how long the wind will know you,
With lullabies for the dead night through.
Babe of the earth, as I blow . . .
Swing high,
To touch at the sky,
And at last lie low.
Lullaby. . . .

But meanwhile the Special Baby's real mother — the one who had told him about running away — was hunting and hunting and *hunting* for him and going nearly distracted and expecting every hair in her head to turn pure white. She went about among all the rest, asking and calling and wanting to know, and finally she made up her mind that she would not stay where she was, but that she would run away and hunt for him. And she did. And when all the things that were waiting to be born heard about it, there was no holding them back either. So out they came, lines and colours and musics and tops and blocks and flame and Noah's arks and mechanical toys and mountains and planets and paints and air and water and alphabets

and jumping-jacks, all, all came out in the wake of the lost Special Baby. And some came early and some came late, some hurried and some hung back. And among all these came people, and many and many of the to-be-born things were hidden in peoples' hearts and did not appear till long after; and this was true of some things which I have not mentioned at all, and of some that have not appeared even yet. But some people did not bring anything in their hearts, and they merely observed that it was a shameful waste, so many shining balls swinging about and only the Special Baby to play with them, and *he* evidently eternally lost.

But the Special Baby's real mother didn't say a word. She only ran and ran on, asking and calling and wanting to know. And at last she came to the Outermost Way and near the Wild Wing of Things, and the Special Baby heard her coming. And when he heard that, he made his choicest coo-noise in his throat and he stretched out his arms to his real mother that he was used to.

And when his real mother heard the coo-noise, she brushed aside the Wild Wing of Things and took him in her arms — and she never saw the

Wind and the Great Black Hush at all, because they are that kind. So she carried the Special Baby off, kicking and crowing and catching at the swinging, shining balls — but they were too big to put in his mouth so there was no danger — and *she* hunted up a place where she could make his clothes and mend his socks and tie on his shoes and rub his little back. But about them all things were going on, and everybody else was doing the same thing, so nobody noticed.

Then, all alone before their home on the Outermost Way and beneath the Wild Wing of Things that was all brushed aside, the Great Black Hush and the Wind looked at each other. And their look clung, as when they had first found light, and they were afraid. For now all space was glowing and shining with swinging balls, and all the things were being born and making homes, and time was rushing by so fast that it awed them who had never seen such a thing before.

"*What* have we done?" demanded the Great Black Hush.

But the Wind was not so much concerned with that. She only grieved and grieved for the Special Baby. And the Great Black Hush

comforted her, and I think he comforts her unto this day.

Only at night. Then, as you know, the Great Black Hush comes from the Outermost Way and fills the air, and with him often and often comes the Wind. And together they wander among all the shining balls — you will know this, if you listen, on many a night — and together they look for the Special Baby. But *he* has grown up, long and long ago, only he still stretches out his hands to everything, for he is the way he was made.

XVIII

THE DECORATION OF INDEPENDENCE

THAT year we celebrated Fourth of July in the Wood Yard.

The town had decided not to have a celebration, though we did not know who had done the actual deciding, and this we used to talk about.

"How can the *town* decide anything?" Delia asked sceptically. "When does it do it?"

"Why," said Margaret Amelia — to whom, her father being a judge, we always turned to explain matters of state, "its principal folks say so."

"Who are its principal folks?" I demanded.

"Why," said Margaret Amelia, "I should think you could tell that. They have the stores and offices and live in the residence part."

I pondered this, for most of the folk in the little town did neither of these things.

"Why don't they have another Fourth of July for the rest, then," I suggested, "and leave them settle on their own celebration?"

Margaret Amelia looked shocked.

"I guess you don't know much about the Decoration of Independence," said she.

The Decoration of Independence — we all called it this — was, then, to go by without attention because the Town said so.

"The Town," said Mary Elizabeth, dreamily, "the Town. It sounds like somebody tall, very high, and pointed at the top, with the rest of her dark and long and flowy — don't it?"

"City," she and I were agreed, sounded like somebody light and sitting down with her skirts spread out.

"Village" sounded like a little soft hollow, not much of any colour, with a steeple to it.

"I like 'Town' best," Mary Elizabeth said. "It sounds more like a mother-woman. 'City' sounds like a lady-woman. And 'Village' sounds like a grandma-woman. I like 'Town' best."

"What I want to do," Margaret Amelia said restlessly, "is to spend my Fourth of July dollar. I had a Fourth of July dollar ever since Christmas. It's no fun spending it with no folks and bands and wagons."

"I've got my birthday dollar yet," I contrib-

uted. "If I spent it for Fourth of July, I'd be glad of it, but if I spend it for anything else, I'll want it back."

"I had a dollar," said Calista, gloomily, "but I used a quarter of it up on the circus. Now I'm glad I did. I wish't I'd stayed to the side-show."

"Stitchy Branchitt says," Betty offered, "that the boys are all going to Poynette and spend their money there. Poynette's got exercises."

Oh, the boys would get a Fourth. Trust them. But what about us? We could not go to Poynette. We could not rise at three A.M. and fire off fire-crackers. No fascinating itinerant hucksters would come the way of a town that held no celebration. We had nowhere to spend our substance, and to do that was to us what Fourth of July implied.

The New Boy came wandering by, eating something. Boys were always eating something that looked better than anything we saw in the candy-shop. Where did they get it? This that he had was soft and pink and chewy, and it rapidly disappeared as he approached us.

Margaret Amelia Rodman threw back her

curls and flashed a sudden radiant smile at the New Boy. She became quite another person from the judicious, somewhat haughty creature whom we knew.

"Let's us get up a Fourth of July celebration," she said.

We held our breath. It never would have occurred to us. But now that she suggested it, why not?

The New Boy leaped up on a gate-post and sat looking down at us, chewing.

"How?" he inquired.

"Get up a partition," said Margaret Amelia. "Circulate it like for take-a-walk at school or teacher's present, and all sign."

"And take it to who?" asked the New Boy.

Margaret Amelia considered.

"My father," she proposed.

The scope of the idea was enormous. Her father was a judge and wore very black clothes every day, and never spoke to any of us. Therefore he must be a great man. Doubtless he could do anything.

Boys, as we knew them, usually flouted everything that we said, but — possibly because of Margaret Amelia's manner of presentation —

this suggestion seemed to strike the New Boy favourably. Afterward we learned that this was probably partly owing to the fact that the fare to Poynette was going to eat distressingly into the boys' Fourth money, unless they walked the ten miles.

By common consent we had Margaret Amelia and the New Boy draw up the "partition." But we all spent a long time on it, and at length it read: —

"We the Undersigned want there should be a July 4 this year. We the Undersigned would like a big one. But if it can't be so very big account of no money, We the Undersigned would like one anyway, and hereby respectfully partition about this in the name of the Decoration of Independence."

There was some doubt whether or not to close this document with "Always sincerely" but we decided to add only the names, and these we set out to secure, the New Boy carrying one copy and Margaret Amelia another. I remember that, to honour the occasion, she put on a pale blue crocheted shawl of her mother's and we all trailed in her wake, worshipfully.

The lists grew amazingly. Long before noon we had to get new papers. By night we had every child that we knew, save Stitchy Branchitt. He had a railroad pass to Poynette, and he favoured the out-of-town celebration. But the personal considerations of economic conditions were as usual sufficient to swing the event, and the next morning I suppose that twenty-five or thirty of us, bearing the names of three or four times as many, marched into Judge Rodman's office.

On the stairs Margaret Amelia had a thought.

"Does your father pay taxes?" she inquired of Mary Elizabeth — who was with us, having been sent down town for starch.

"On his watch — he used to," said Mary Elizabeth, doubtfully. "But he hasn't got that any more."

"Well, I don't know," said Margaret Amelia, "whether we'd really ought to of put down any names that their fathers don't pay taxes. It may make a difference. I guess you're the only one we got that their fathers don't — that he ain't —"

I fancy that what Margaret Amelia had in mind was that Mary Elizabeth's father was the

only one who lived meanly; for many of the others must have gone untaxed, but they lived in trim, rented houses, and we knew no difference.

Mary Elizabeth was visibly disturbed.

"I never thought of that," she said. "Maybe I better scratch me off."

But there seemed to me to be something indefinably the matter with this.

"The Fourth of July is for everybody, isn't it?" I said. "Didn't the whole country think of it?"

"I think it's like a town though," said Margaret Amelia. "The principal folks decided it, I'm sure. And they *always* pay taxes."

We appealed to the New Boy, as authority superior even to Margaret Amelia. How was this — did the Decoration of Independence mean everybody, or not? Could Mary Elizabeth sign the partition since her father paid no taxes?

"Well," said the New Boy, "it *says* everybody, don't it? But nobody ever gets to ride in the parade but distinguished citizens — it always says them, you know. I s'pose maybe it meant the folks that pays the taxes, only it didn't like to put it in."

"I better take my name off," said Mary Elizabeth, decidedly. "It might hurt."

So the New Boy produced a stump of pencil, and we found the right paper, and held it up against the wall of the stairway, and Mary Elizabeth scratched her name off.

"I won't come up, then," she whispered to me, and made her way down the stairs, her head held very high.

Judge Rodman was in his office — he makes, I find, my eternal picture of "judge," short, thick, frock-coated, bearded, bald, spectacled, square-toed, and with his hands full of loose papers and his watch-chain shining.

"Bless us," he said, too, as a judge should.

Margaret Amelia was ahead, — still in the pale blue crocheted shawl, — and she and the New Boy laid down the papers, and the judge picked them up, and read. His big pink face flushed the more, and he took off his spectacles and brushed his eyes, and he cleared his throat, and beamed down on us, and stood nodding. . . . I remember that he had an editorial in his paper the next night called "A Lesson to the Community," and another, later, "Out of the Mouths of Babes" — for Judge Rodman was a very

great man, and owned the newspaper and the brewery and the principal department store, and had been to the legislature; and his newspaper was always thick with editorials about honouring the flag and reverencing authority and the beauties of home life — Miss Messmore used to cut them out and read them to us at General Exercises.

So Judge Rodman called a Town meeting in the Engine House, and we all hung about the door downstairs, because they said that if children went to the meeting, they would scrape their feet on the bare floor so that nobody could hear a sound; and so we waited outside until we heard hands clapped and the Doxology sung, and then we knew that it had passed.

We were having a new Court House that year, so the Court House yard was not available for exercises: and the school grounds had been sown with grass seed in the beginning of vacation, and the market-place was nothing but a small vacant lot. So there was only one place to have the exercises: the Wood Yard. And as there was very little money to do anything with, it was voted to ask the women to take charge of the celebration and arrange

something "tasty, up-to-date, and patriotic," as Judge Rodman put it. They set themselves to do it. And none of us who were the children then will ever forget that Fourth of July celebration — yet this is not because of what the women planned, nor of anything that the committee of which Judge Rodman was chairman thought to do for the sake of the day.

Our discussion of their plans was not without pessimism.

"Of course what they get up won't be any *real* good," the New Boy advanced. "They'll stick the school organ up on the platform, and that sounds awful skimpy outdoors. And the church choirs 'll sing. And somebody 'll stand up and scold and go on about nothing. But it'll get folks here, and balloon men, and stuff to sell, and a band; so I s'pose we can stand the other doin's."

"And there's fireworks on the canal bank in the evening," we reminded him.

Fourth of July morning began as usual before it dawned. The New Boy and the ten of his tribe assembled at half past three on the lawn between our house and that of the New Family, and, at a rough estimate, each fired off the cost

of his fare to Poynette and return. Mary Elizabeth and I awoke and listened, giving occasional ecstatic pulls at our bell. Then we rose and watched the boys go ramping on toward other fields, and, we breathed the dim beauty of the hour, and, I think, wondered if it knew that it was Fourth of July, and we went back to bed, conscious that we were missing a good sixth of the day, a treasure which, as usual, the boys were sharing.

After her work was done, Mary Elizabeth and I took our bags of torpedoes and popped them off on the front bricks. Delia was allowed to have fire-crackers if she did not shoot them off by herself, and she was ardently absorbed in them on their horse-block, with her father. Calista had brothers, and had put her seventy-five cents in with their money on condition that she be allowed to stay with them through the day. Margaret Amelia and Betty always stopped at home until annual giant crackers were fired from before their piazza, with Judge Rodman officiating in his shirt-sleeves, and Mrs. Rodman watching in a starched white "wrapper" on the veranda and uttering little cries, all under the largest flag that there was in the

town, floating from the highest flagpole. Mary Elizabeth and I had glimpses of them all in a general survey which we made, resulting in satisfactory proof that the expected merry-go-round, the pop-corn wagon, a chocolate cart, an ice-cream cone man, and a balloon man and woman were already posted expectantly about.

"If it wasn't for them, though," observed Mary Elizabeth to me, "the town wouldn't be really acting like Fourth of July, do you think so? It just kind of lazes along, like a holiday."

We looked critically at the sunswept street. The general aspect of the time was that people had seized upon it to do a little extra watering, or some postponed weeding, or to tinker at the screens.

"How could it act, though?" I inquired.

"Well," said Mary Elizabeth, "a river flows, don't it? And I s'pose a mountain towers. And the sea keeps a-coming in . . . and they all act like themselves. Only just a Town don't take any notice of itself — even on the Fourth."

That afternoon we were all dressed in our white dresses — "Mine used to have a sprig in it," said Mary Elizabeth, "but it's so faded out anybody 'd 'most say it was white, don't you

think so?" — and we children met at the Rodmans' — where Margaret Amelia and Betty appeared in white embroidered dresses and blue ribbons and blue stockings, and we marched down the hill, behind the band, to the Wood Yard. The Wood Yard had great flags and poles set at intervals, with bunting festooned between, and the platform was covered with bunting, and the great open space of the yard was laid with board benches. Place in front was reserved for us, and already the rest of the town packed the Yard and hung about the fences. Stitchy Branchitt had given up his journey to Poynette after all, and had established a lemonade stand at the Wood Yard gate — "a fool thing to do," the New Boy observed plainly. "He knows we've spent all we had, and the big folks never think your stuff's clean." But Stitchy was enormously enjoying himself by deafeningly shouting: —

"Here's what you get — here's what you get — here's what you get. Cheap — cheap — *cheap!*"

"Quit cheepin' like some kind o' bir-r-rd," said the New Boy, out of one corner of his mouth, as he passed him.

Just inside the Wood Yard gate I saw, with something of a shock, Mary Elizabeth's father standing. He was leaning against the fence, with his arms folded, and as he caught the look of Mary Elizabeth, who was walking with me, he smiled, and I was further surprised to see how kind his eyes were. They were almost like my own father's eyes. This seemed to me somehow a very curious thing, and I turned and looked at Mary Elizabeth, and thought: "Why, it's her *father* — just the same as mine." It surprised me, too, to see him there. When I came to think of it, I had never before seen him where folk were. Always, unless Mary Elizabeth were with him, he had been walking alone, or sitting down where other people never sat.

Judge Rodman was on the platform, and as soon as the band and the choirs would let him — he made several false starts at rhetorical pauses in the music — he introduced a clergyman who had always lived in the town and who prayed for the continuance of peace and the safe conquest of all our enemies. Then Judge Rodman himself made the address, having generously consented to do so when it was proposed

to keep the money in the town by hiring a local speaker. He began with the Norsemen and descended through Queen Isabella and Columbus and the Colonies, making a détour of Sir Walter Raleigh and his cloak, Benedict Arnold, Israel Putnam and Pocahontas, and so by way of Valley Forge and the Delaware to Faneuil Hall and the spirit of 1776. It was a grand flight, filled with what were afterward freely referred to as magnificent passages about the storm, the glory of war, and the love of our fellow-men.

("Supposing you happen to love the enemy," said Mary Elizabeth, afterward.

"Well, a pretty thing that would be to do," said the New Boy, shocked.

"We had it in the Sunday school lesson," Mary Elizabeth maintained.

"Oh, well," said the New Boy. "I don't mean about such things. I mean about what you *do*."

But I remember that Mary Elizabeth still looked puzzled.)

Especially was Judge Rodman's final sentence generally repeated for days afterward: —

"At Faneuil Hall," said the judge, "the

hour at last had struck. The hands on the face of the clock stood still. 'The force of Nature could no further go.' The supreme thing had been accomplished. Henceforth we were embalmed in the everlasting and unchangeable essence of freedom — freedom — *freedom.*"

Indeed, he held our attention from the first, both because he did not read what he said, and because the ice in the pitcher at his elbow had melted before he began and did not require watching.

Then came the moment when, having completed his address, he took up the Decoration of Independence, to read it; and began the hunt for his spectacles. We watched him go through his pockets, but we did so with an interest which somewhat abated when he began the second round.

"What *is* the Decoration of Independence, anyhow?" I whispered to Mary Elizabeth, our acquaintance with it having been limited to learning it "by heart" in school.

"Why, don't you know?" Mary Elizabeth returned. "It's that thing Miss Messmore can say so fast. It's when we was the British."

"Who decorated it?" I wanted to know.

"George Washington," replied Mary Elizabeth.

"How?" I pressed it. "How'd he do it?"

"I don't know — but I think that's what he wanted of the cherry blossoms," said she.

At this point Judge Rodman gave up the search.

"I deeply regret," said he, "that I shall be obliged to forego my reading of our national document which, next to the Constitution itself, best embodies our unchanging principles."

And then he added something which smote the front rows suddenly breathless: —

"However, it occurs to me, since this is preeminently the children's celebration and since I am given to understand that our public schools now bestow due and proper attention upon the teaching of civil government, that it will be a fitting thing, a moving thing even, to hear these words of our great foundation spoken in childish tones. Miss Messmore, can you, as teacher of the city schools, in the grades where the idea of our celebration so fittingly originated, among the tender young, can you recommend, madam, perhaps, one of your bright pupils to repeat for us these undying utterances whose

commitment has now become, as I understand it, a part of our public school curriculum?"

There was an instant's pause, and then I heard Margaret Amelia Rodman's name spoken. Miss Messmore had uttered it. Judge Rodman was repeating it, smiling blandly down with a pleased diffidence.

"There can be no one more fitted to do this, Judge Rodman," Miss Messmore had promptly said, "than your daughter, Margaret Amelia, at whose suggestion this celebration, indeed, has come about."

Poor Margaret Amelia. In spite of her embroidered gown, her blue ribbons, and her blue stockings, I have seldom seen anyone look so wretched as did she when they made her mount that platform. To give her courage her father met her, and took her hand. And then, in his pride and confidence, something else occurred to him.

"Tell us, Margaret Amelia," he said with a gesture infinitely paternal, "how came the children to think of demanding of us wise-heads that we give observance to this day which we had already voted to let slip past unattended? What spirit moved the children to this act?"

At first Margaret Amelia merely twisted, and fingered her sash at the side. Margaret Amelia was always called on for visitors' days, and the like. She could usually command her faculties and give a straightforward answer, not so much because of what she knew as because of her unfailing self-confidence. Of this her father was serenely aware; but, aware also that the situation made unusual demands, he concluded to help her somewhat.

"How came the children," he encouragingly put it, "to think of making this fine effort to save our National holiday this year?"

Margaret Amelia straightened slightly. She faced her audience with something of her native confidence, and told them: —

"Why," she said, "we all had some Fourth of July money, and there wasn't going to be any way to spend it."

A ripple of laughter ran round, and Judge Rodman's placid pink turned to purple.

"I fear," he observed gravely, "that the immediate nature of the event has somewhat obscured the real significance of the children's most superior movement. Now, my child! Miss Messmore thinks that you should recite

for us at least a portion of the Declaration of Independence. Will you do so?"

Margaret Amelia looked at him, down at us, away toward the waiting Wood Yard, and then at Miss Messmore.

"Is it that about 'The shades of night were falling fast'?" she demanded.

In the roar of laughter that followed, Margaret Amelia ran down, poor child, and sobbed on Miss Messmore's shoulder. I never think of that moment without something of a return of my swelling sympathy for her who suffered this species of martyrdom, and so needlessly. I have seen, out of schools and out of certain of our superstitions, many martyrdoms result, but never one that has touched me more.

I do not know whether something of this feeling was in the voice that we next heard speaking, or whether that which animated it was only its own bitterness. That voice sounded, clear and low-pitched, through the time's confusion.

"I will read the Declaration of Independence," it said.

And making his way through the crowd, and mounting the platform steps, we saw Mary Elizabeth's father.

Instinctively I put out my hand to her. But he was wholly himself, and this I think that she knew from the first. He was neatly dressed, and he laid his shabby hat on the table and picked up the book with a tranquil air of command. I remember how frail he looked as he buttoned his worn coat, and began to read.

"'We, the people of the United States —'"

It was the first time that I had ever thought of Mary Elizabeth's father as to be classed with anybody. He had never had employment, he belonged to no business, to no church, to no class of any sort. He merely lived over across the tracks, and he went and came alone. And here he was saying "*We*, the people of the United States," just as if he belonged.

When my vague fear had subsided lest they might stop his reading because he was not a taxpayer, I listened for the first time in my life to what he read. To be sure, I had — more or less — learned it. Now I listened.

"Free and equal," I heard him say, and I wondered what this meant. "Free and equal." But there were Mary Elizabeth and I, were we equal? Perhaps, though, it didn't mean little girls — only grown-ups. But there were Mary

Elizabeth's father and mother, and all the other fathers and mothers, they were grown up, and were they equal? And what were they free from, I wondered. Perhaps, though, I didn't know what these words meant. "Free and equal" sounded like fairies, but folks I was accustomed to think of as burdened, and as different from one another, as Judge Rodman was different from Mary Elizabeth's father. This, however, was the first time that ever I had caught the word right: Not Decoration, but Declaration of Independence, it seemed!

Mary Elizabeth's father finished, and closed the book, and stood for a moment looking over the Wood Yard. He was very tall and pale, and seeing him with something of dignity in his carriage I realized with astonishment that, if he were "dressed up," he would look just like the men in the choir, just like the minister himself. Then suddenly he smiled round at us all, and even broke into a moment of soft and pleasant laughter.

"It has been a long time," he said, "since I have had occasion to remember the Declaration of Independence. I am glad to have had it called to my attention. We are in danger of

forgetting about it — some of us. May I venture to suggest that, when it is taught in the schools, it be made quite clear to whom this document refers. And for the rest, my friends, God bless us all — some day."

"Bless us," was what Judge Rodman had said. I remember wondering if they meant the same thing.

He turned and went down the steps, and at the foot he staggered a little, and I saw with something of pride that it was my father who went to him and led him away.

At once the band struck gayly into a patriotic air, and the people on all the benches got to their feet, and the men took off their hats. And above the music I heard Stitchy Branchitt beginning to shout again: —

"Here's what you get — here's what you get — here's what you get! Something cheap — cheap — *cheap!*"

When I came home from the fireworks with Delia's family and Mary Elizabeth, my father and mother were sitting on the veranda.

"It's we who are to blame," I heard my father saying, "though we're fine at glossing it over."

I wondered what had happened, and I sat down on the top step and began to untie my last torpedo from the corner of my handkerchief. Mary Elizabeth had one left, too, and we had agreed to throw them on the stone window-sills of our rooms as a final salute.

"Let's ask her now," said father.

Mother leaned toward me.

"Dear," she said, "father has been having a talk with Mary Elizabeth's father and mother. And — when her father isn't here any more — which may not be long now, we think . . . would you like us to have Mary Elizabeth come and live here?"

"With us?" I cried. "*With us?*"

Yes, they meant with us.

"To work?" I demanded.

"To be," mother said.

"Oh, yes, *yes!*" I welcomed it. "But her father — where will he be?"

"In a little while now," father said, "he will be free — and perhaps even equal."

I did not understand this wholly. Besides, there was far too much to think about. I turned toward the house of the New Family. A light glowed in Mary Elizabeth's room. I

brought down my torpedo on the brick walk, and it exploded merrily, and from Mary Elizabeth's window came an answering pop.

"Then Mary Elizabeth will get free and equal too!" I cried joyously.

XIX

EARTH-MOTHER

And for that day and that night, and for all the days and all the nights, I should like to tell a story about the Earth, and about some of the things that it keeps expecting.

And if it were Sometime Far Away — say 1950 — or 2050 — or 3050 — I should like to meet some Children of Then, and tell them this story about Now, and hear them all talk of what a curious place the earth must have been long ago, and of how many things it did not yet do.

And their Long Ago is our Now!

For ages and ages (I should say to the Children of Then) the Earth was a great round place of land and water, with trees, fields, cities, mountains, and the like dotted about on it in a pattern; and it spun and spun, out in space, like an enormous engraved ball tossed up in the air from somewhere. And many people thought that this was all there was to know about it,

and after school they shut up their geographies and went about engraving new trees, fields, cities, and such things on the outside of the earth. And they truly thought that this was All, and they kept on doing it, rather tired but very independent.

Now the Earth had a friend and companion whom nobody thought much about. It was Earth's Shadow, cast by the sun in the way that any other shadow is cast, but it was such a big shadow that of course it fell far, far out in space. And as Earth went round, naturally its Shadow went round, and if one could have looked down, one would have seen the Shadow sticking out and out, so that the Earth and its Shadow-handle would have seemed almost like a huge saucepan filled with cities and people, all being held out over the sun, to get them done.

Among the cities was one very beautiful City. She wore robes of green or of white, delicately embroidered with streets in a free and exquisite pattern, and her hair was like a flowing river, and at night she put on many glorious jewels. And she had the power to change herself at will into a woman. This was a power, however, which she had never yet used,

and indeed she did not yet know wholly that she had this power, but she used to dream about it, and sometimes she used to sing about the dream, softly, to herself. Men thought that this song was the roar of the City's traffic, but it was not so.

Now the Earth was most anxious for this City to become a woman because, although the Earth whirled like an enormous engraved ball and seemed like a saucepan held over the sun, still all the time it was really just the Earth, and it was very human and tired and discouraged, and it needed a woman to rest it and to sing to it and to work with it, in her way. But there were none, because all the ordinary women were busy with *their* children. So the only way seemed to be for the City to be a woman, as she knew how to be; and the Earth was most anxious to have this happen. And it tried to see how it could bring this about.

I think that the Earth may have asked the Moon, because she is a woman and might be expected to know something about it. But the Moon, as usual, was asleep on the sky, with a fine mosquito-netting of mist all about her, and she said not a word. (If you look at the Moon,

you can see how like a beautiful, sleeping face she seems.) I think that the Earth may have asked Mars, too, because he is so very near that it would be only polite to consult him. But he said: "I'm only a few million years old yet. Don't expect me to understand either cities or people." And finally the Earth asked its Shadow.

"Shadow, dear," it said, "you are pretty deep. Can't you tell me how to make this City turn into a woman? For I want her to work with me, in *her* way."

The Shadow, who did nothing but run to keep up with the Earth, let a few thousand miles sweep by, and then it said:—

"Really, I wouldn't know. I'm not up on much but travel."

"Well," said the Earth, "then please just ask the Uttermost Spaces. You continually pass by that way and somebody ought to know something."

So the Shadow swept along the Uttermost Spaces and made an abyss-to-abyss canvass.

"The Uttermost Spaces want to know," the Shadow reported next day, "whether in all that City there is a child. They said if there is, it could probably do what you want."

"A child," said the Earth. "Well, sea caves and firmaments. Of course there is. What do the Uttermost Spaces think I'm in the Earth business for if it isn't for the Children?"

"I don't know," said its Shadow, rather sulkily. "I'm only telling you what I heard. If you're cross with me, I won't keep up with you. I'm about tired of it anyway."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the Earth, "You mustn't mind me. I'm always a little sunstruck. A thousand thanks. Come along, do."

"A child," thought the Earth, "a child. How could a child change a City into a woman? And *what* child?"

But it was a very wise old Earth, and to its mind all children are valuable. So after a time it concluded that one child in that City would be as good as another, and perhaps any child could work the miracle. So it said: "I choose to work the miracle that child who is thinking about the most beautiful thing in the world."

Then it listened.

Now, since the feet of people are pressed all day long to earth, it is true that the Earth can talk with everyone and, by listening, can

know what is in each heart. When it listened this time, it chanced that it was the middle of the night, when nearly every little child was sleeping and dreaming. But there was one little girl lying wide awake and staring out her bedroom window up at the stars, and as soon as the Earth listened to her thoughts, it knew that she was the one.

Of what do you suppose she was thinking? She was thinking of her mother, who had died before she could remember her, and wondering where she was; and she was picturing what her mother had looked like, and what her mother would have said to her, and how her mother's arms would have felt about her, and her mother's good-night kiss; and she was wondering how it would be to wake in the night, a little frightened, and turn and stretch out her arms and find her mother breathing there beside her, ready to wake her and give her an in-the-middle-of-the-night kiss and send her back to sleep again. And she thought about it all so longingly that her little heart was like nothing in the world so much as the one word "Mother."

"It will be you," said the Earth.

So the Earth spoke to its Shadow who was, of course, just then fastened to that same side, it being night.

"Shadow, dear," Earth said, like a prescription, "fold closely about her and drop out a dream or two. But do not let her forget."

So Shadow folded about her and dropped out a dream or two. And all night Earth lapped her in its silences, but they did not let her forget. And Shadow left word with Morning, telling Morning what to do, and she kissed the little girl's eyelids so that the first thing she thought when she waked was how wonderful it would be to be kissed awake by her mother. And her little heart beat *Mother* in her breast.

As soon as she was dressed ("Muvvers wouldn't pinch your feet with the button-hook, or tie your ribbon too tight, or get your laxtixs short so's they pull," she thought), as soon as she was dressed, and had pressed her feet to Earth, Earth began to talk to her.

"Go out and find a mother," it said to her.

"My muvver is dead," thought the little girl.

Earth said: "I am covered with mothers and with those who ought to be mothers. Go to

them. Tell them you haven't any mother. Wouldn't one of those be next best?"

And the Earth said so much, and the little girl's heart so strongly beat *Mother*, that she could not help going to see.

On the street she looked very little and she felt — oh, *much* littler than in the house with furniture. For the street seemed to be merely a world of Skirts — skirts everywhere and also the bottoms of men's coats with impersonal Legs below. And these said nothing. Away up above were Voices, talking very fast, and to one another, and entirely leaving her out. She was out of the conversations and out of account, and it felt far more lonely than it did with just furniture. Now and then another child would pass who would look at her as if she really were there; but everyone was hanging on its mother's hand or her Skirt, or else, if the child were alone, a Voice from ahead or behind was saying: "Hurry, dear. Mother won't wait. Come and see what's in *this* window." Littlegirl thought how wonderful that would be, to have somebody ahead looking back for her, and she waited on purpose, by a hydrant, and pretended that she was going to hear somebody saying: "*Do* come

on, dear. Mother'll be late for her fitting." But nobody said anything. Only an automobile stood close by the hydrant and in it was a little yellow-haired girl, and just at that moment a lady came from a shop and got in the automobile and handed the little girl a white tissue-paper parcel and said: "Sit farther over — there's a dear. Now, that's for you, but don't open it till we get home." *What* was in the parcel, Littlegirl wondered, and stood looking after the automobile until it was lost. One little boy passed her, holding tightly to his mother's hand, and she stooping over him and he *crying*. Littlegirl tried to think what could be bad enough to cry about when you had hold of your mother's hand and she was bending over you. A stone in your shoe? Or a pin in your neck? Or because you'd lost your locket? But would any of those things matter enough to cry when your mother had hold of your hand? She looked up at the place beside her where her own mother would be walking and tried to see where her face would be.

And as she looked up, she saw the tops of the high buildings across the street, and below them the windows hung thick as pictures on a wall,

and thicker. The shop doors were open like doors to wonderful, mysterious palaces where you went in with your mother and she picked out your dresses and said: "Wouldn't you like this one, dear? Mother used to have one like this when *she* was a little girl." And Littlegirl saw, too, one of the side streets, and how it was all lined with homes, whose doors were shut, like closed lips with nothing to say to anybody save those who lived there — the children who were promised Christmas trees — and *got* them, too. And between shops and homes was the world of Skirts and Voices, mothers whose little girls were at home, daddys who would run up the front steps at night and cry: "Come here, Puss. Did you grow any since morning?" Or, "*Where's my son?*" (Littlegirl knew how it went — she had heard them.) Shops and homes and crowds — a City! A City for everybody but her.

When the Earth — who all this time was listening — heard her think that, it made to flow up into her little heart the longing to belong to somebody. And Littlegirl ran straight up to a lady in blue linen, who was passing.

"Are you somebody's muvver?" she asked.

The lady looked down in the little face and stood still.

"No," she said soberly.

Littlegirl slipped her hand in her white glove.

"I aren't anybody's little girl," she said. "Let's trade each other."

And the Earth, who was listening, made to flow in the lady's heart an old longing.

"Let's go in here, at any rate," said the Lady, "and talk it over."

So they went in a wonderful place, all made of mirrors, and jars of bonbons, and long trays, as big as doll cradles, and filled with bonbons too. And they sat at a cool table, under a whirry fan, and had before them thick, foamy, frozen chocolate. And the Blue Linen Lady said:—

"But whose little girl are you, really?"

"I'm *my* little girl, I think," said Littlegirl. "I don't know who else's."

"With whom do you live?" asked the Lady.

"Some peoples," said Littlegirl, "that's other people's muvvers. Don't let's say about them."

"What shall we say about?" asked the Lady, smiling.

"Let's pretend you was my muvver," said Littlegirl.

The lady looked startled, but she nodded slowly.

"Very well," she said. "I'll play that. How do you play it?"

Littlegirl hesitated and looked down in her chocolate.

"I don't know berry well," she said soberly. "*You* say how."

"Well," said the Lady, "if you were my little girl, I should probably be saying to you, 'Do you like this, dear? Don't eat it fast. And take little bits of bites.' And you would say, 'Yes, mother.' And then what?"

Littlegirl looked deep down her chocolate. She was making a cave in one side of it, with the foamy part on top for snow. And while she looked the snow suddenly seemed to melt and brim over, and she looked at the lady mutely.

"I don't know how," she said; "I don't know how!"

"Never mind!" said the Lady, very quickly and a little unsteadily, "I'll tell you a story instead — shall I?"

So the Blue Linen Lady told her a really wonderful story. It was about a dwarf who was made of gold, all but his heart, and about what

a terrible time he had trying to pretend that he was a truly, flesh and blood person. It made him so unhappy to have to pretend all the time that he got *scandalous* cross to everybody, and nothing could please him. His gold kept getting harder and harder till he could move only with the greatest difficulty, and it looked as if his heart were going golden too. And if it did, of course he would die. But one night, just as the soft outside edges of his heart began to take on a shining tinge, a little boy ran out in the road where the dwarf was passing, and in the dark mistook him for his father, and jumped up and threw his arms about the dwarf's neck and hugged him. And of a sudden the dwarf's heart began to beat, and when he got in the house, he saw that he wasn't gold any more, and he wasn't a dwarf — but he was straight and strong and real. "And so," the Lady ended it, "you must love every grown-up you can, because maybe their hearts are turning into gold and you can stop it that way."

"An' must *you* love every children?" asked Littlegirl, very low.

"Yes," said the Lady, "I must."

"An' will you love me an' be my muvver?" asked Littlegirl.

The Blue Linen Lady sighed.

"You dear little thing," she said, "I'd love it — I'd love it. But I truly haven't any place for you to live — or any time to give you. Come now — I'm going to get you some candy and take you back where you belong — *in an automobile*. Won't that be fun?"

But when she turned for the candy, Littlegirl slipped out the door and ran and ran as fast as she could. (She had thanked the lady, first thing, for the thick, frozen, foamy chocolate, so *that* part was all right.) And Littlegirl went round a corner and lost herself in a crowd — in which it is far easier to lose yourself than in the woods. And there she was again, worse off than before, because she had felt how it would feel to feel that she had a mother.

The Earth — who would have shaken its head if it could without disarranging everything on it — said things instead to its Shadow — who was by now on the other side of the world from the City.

"Shadow, dear," said the Earth, "what *do* you think of that?"

"The very Uttermost Spaces are ashamed for her," said the Shadow.

But of course the Blue Linen Lady had no idea that the Earth and its Shadow and the Uttermost Spaces had been watching to see what she did.

Littlegirl ran on, many a weary block, and though she met mother-looking women she dared speak to none of them for fear they would offer to take her back in an automobile, with some candy, to the people with whom she lived-without-belonging. And of late, these people had said things in her presence about the many mouths to feed, and she had heard, and had understood, and it had made her heart beat *Mother*, as it had when she wakened that day.

At last, when she was most particularly tired, she came to the park where it was large and cool and woodsy and wonderful. But in the park the un-motherness of things was worse than ever. To be sure, there were no mothers there, only nurse-maids. But the nurse-maids and the children and the covers-to-baby-carriages were all so ruffly or lacy or embroidery or starchy and so white that *mother* was written all over them. Nobody else could have cared to have them like that. How wonderful it would be, Littlegirl thought, to be paid attention to as if

you were a really person and not just hanging on the edges. Even the squirrels were coaxed and beckoned. She sat down on the edge of a bench on which an old gentleman was feeding peanuts to a squirrel perched on his knee, and she thought it would be next best to having a Christmas tree to be a squirrel and have somebody taking pains like that to keep her near by.

"Where's your nurse, my dear?" the old gentleman asked her finally, and she ran away so that he should not guess that she was her own little girl and nobody else's.

Wherever she saw a policeman, she lingered beside a group of children so that he would think that she belonged to them. And once, for a long way, she trotted behind two nurses and five children, pretending that she belonged. Once a thin, stooped youth in spectacles called her and gave her an orange. He was sitting alone on a bench with his chin in his chest, and he looked ill and unhappy. Littlegirl wondered if this was because he didn't have any mother either, and she longed to ask him; but she was afraid he would not want to own to not having any, in a world where nearly everyone seemed to have one. So she played through the long hours

of the morning. So, having lunched on the orange, she played through the long hours of the afternoon. And then Dusk began to come — and Dusk meant that Earth's Shadow had run round again, and was coming on the side where the City lay.

And when the Shadow reached the park, there, on a knoll beside a barberry bush, he found Littlegirl lying fast asleep.

In a great flutter he questioned the Earth.

"Listen," said Shadow, "what *are* you thinking of? Here is the child who was to work the miracle and make the City turn into a woman. And she is lying alone in the park. And I'm coming on and I'll have to make it all dark and frighten her. What does this mean?"

But the Earth, who is closer to people than is its Shadow, merely said: —

"Wait, Shadow. I am listening. I can hear the speeding of many feet. And I think that the miracle has begun."

It was true that all through the City there was the speeding of many feet, and on one errand. Wires and messengers were busy, automobiles were busy, blue-coated men were busy, and all of them were doing the same thing: Looking for

Littlegirl. Busiest of all was the Blue Linen Lady, who felt herself and nobody else responsible for Littlegirl's loss.

"It is too dreadful," she kept saying over and over, "I had her with me. She gave me my chance, and I didn't take it. If anything has happened to her, I shall never forgive myself."

"That's the way people always talk *afterward*," said the Earth's Shadow. "Why don't they ever talk that way before? I'd ask the Uttermost Spaces, but I know they don't know."

But the wise Earth only listened and made to flow to the Blue Linen Lady's heart an old longing. And when they had traced Littlegirl as far as the park — for it seemed that many of the busy Skirts and Coats and Voices had noticed her, only they were so very busy — the Blue Linen Lady herself went into the park, and it was the light of her automobile that flashed white on the glimmering frock of Littlegirl.

Littlegirl was wakened, as never before within her memory she had been wakened, by tender arms about her, lifting her, and soft lips kissing

her, many and many a time. And waking so, in the strange, great Dark, with the new shapes of trees above her and tenderness wrapping her round, and an in-the-middle-of-the-night kiss on her lips, Littlegirl could think of but one thing that had happened: —

"Oh, I'm *glad* I died — I'm *glad* I died!" she said.

"You haven't died, you little thing!" cried the Blue Linen Lady. "You're alive — and if they'll let you stay, you're never going to leave me. I've made up my mind to *that.* Come — come, dear."

Littlegirl lay quite still, too happy to speak or think. For somebody had said "dear," had even said "Come, dear." And it didn't mean a little girl away ahead, or away back, or in an automobile. *It meant her.*

The Earth's Shadow brooded over the two and helped them to be very near.

"It's worth keeping up with you all this time," Shadow said to the Earth, "to see things like this. Even the Uttermost Spaces are touched."

But the Earth was silent, listening. For the City, the beautiful, green-robed City lying in her glorious night jewels, knew what was hap-

pening too. And when the Lady lifted Littlegirl, to carry her away, it was as if something had happened which had touched the life of the City herself. She listened, as the Earth was listening, and the soft crooning which men thought was the roar of her traffic was really her song about what she heard. For the story of Littlegirl spread and echoed, and other children's stories like hers were in the song, and it was one of the times when the heart of the City was stirred to a great, new measure. At last the City understood the homelessness of children, and their labour, and their suffering, and the waste of them; and she brooded above them like a mother. . . . And suddenly she knew herself, that she *was* the mother of all little children, and that she must care for them like a mother *if she was to keep herself alive.* And if they were to grow up to be her Family, and not just her pretend family, with nobody looking out for anybody else — as no true family would do.

"Is it well?" asked the Shadow, softly, of the Earth.

"It is well," said the Earth, in deep content. "Don't you hear the human voices beginning

to sing with her? Don't you see the other Cities watching? Oh, it is well indeed."

"I'll go and mention it to the Uttermost Spaces," said the Shadow.

And, in time, so he did.

XX

THREE TO MAKE READY

Red mosquito-netting, preferably from peach baskets, was best for bottles of pink water. You soaked the netting for a time depending in length on the shade of pink you desired — light, deep, or plain. A very little red ink produced a beautiful red water, likewise of a superior tint. Violet ink, diluted, remained true to type. Cold coffee gave the browns and yellows. Green tissue paper dissolved into somewhat dull emerald. Pure blue and orange, however, had been almost impossible to obtain save by recourse to our paint boxes, too choice to be used in this fashion, or to a chance artificial flower on an accessible hat — of which we were not at all too choice, but whose utilization might be followed, not to say attended, by consequences.

That August afternoon we were at work on a grand scale. At the Rodmans, who lived on the top of the hill overlooking the town and the

peaceful westward-lying valley of the river, we had chosen to set up a great Soda Fountain, the like of which had never been.

"It's the kind of a fountain," Margaret Amelia Rodman explained, "that knights used to drink at. That kind."

We classified it instantly.

"Now," she went on, "us damsels are getting this thing up for the knights that are tourmeying. If the king knew it, he wouldn't leave us do it, because he'd think it's beneath our dignity. But he don't know it. He's off. He's to the chase. But all the king's household is inside the palace, and us damsels have to be secret, getting up our preparations. Now we must divide up the — er — responsibility."

I listened, spellbound.

"I thought you and Betty didn't like to play Pretend," I was surprised into saying.

"Why, we'll pretend if there's anything to pretend *about* that's real," said Margaret Amelia, haughtily.

They told us where in the palace the various ingredients were likely to be found. Red mosquito-netting, perhaps, in the cellar — at this time of day fairly safe. Red and violet ink

in the library — very dangerous indeed at this hour. Cold coffee — almost unobtainable. Green tissue paper, to be taken from the flower-pots in the dining-room — exceedingly dangerous. Blue and orange, if discoverable at all, then in the Christmas tree box in the trunk room — attended by few perils as to meetings en route, but in respect to appropriating what was desired, by the greatest perils of all.

This last adventure the Rodmans themselves heroically undertook. It was also conceded that, on their return from their quest — provided they ever did return alive — it would be theirs to procure the necessary cold coffee. The other adventures were distributed, and Mary Elizabeth and I were told off together to penetrate the cellar in search of red mosquito-netting. The bottles had already been collected, and these little Harold Rodman was left to guard and luxuriously to fill with water and luxuriously to empty.

There was an outside cellar door, and it was closed. This invited Mary Elizabeth and me to an expedition or two before we even entered. We slid from the top to the bottom, sitting, standing, and backward. Then, since Harold was

beginning to observe us with some attention, we lifted the ring — *the ring* — in the door and descended.

"Aladdin immediately beheld bags of inexhaustible riches," said Mary Elizabeth, almost reverently.

First, there was a long, narrow passage lined with ash barrels, a derelict coal scuttle, starch boxes, mummies of brooms, and the like. But at this point if we had chanced on the red mosquito-netting, we should have felt distinctly cheated of some right. A little farther on, however, the passage branched, and we stood in delighted uncertainty. If the giant lived one way and the gorgon the other, which was our way ?

The way that we did choose led into a small round cellar, lighted by a narrow, dusty window, now closed. Formless things stood everywhere — crates, tubs, shelves whose ghostly contents were shrouded by newspapers. It occurred to me that I had never yet told Mary Elizabeth about our cellar. I decided to do so then and there. She backed up against the wall to listen, manifestly so that there should be nothing over her shoulder.

Our cellar was a round, bricked-in place under the dining-room. Sometimes I had been down there while they had been selecting preserves by candle-light. And I had long ago settled that the curved walls were set with little sealed doors behind each of which *He* sat. These *He's* were not in the least unfriendly — they merely sat there close to the wall, square shouldered and very still, looking neither to right nor left, waiting. Probably, I thought, it might happen some day — whatever they waited for; and then they would all go away. Meanwhile, there they were; and they evidently knew that I knew they were there, but they evidently did not expect me to mention it; for once, when I did so, they all stopped doing nothing and looked at me, all together, as if something used their eyes for them at a signal. It was to Mary Gilbraith that I had spoken, while she was at our house-cleaning, and the moment I had chosen was when she was down in the cellar without a candle and I was lying flat on the floor above her, peering down the trap doorway.

"Mary," I said, "they's a big row of *He's* sitting close together inside the wall. They've got big foreheads. Bang on the wall and see if

they'll answer —" for I had always longed to bang and had never quite dared.

"Oh, my great Scotland!" said Mary Gilbraith, and was up the ladder in a second. That was when they looked at me, and then I knew that I should not have spoken to her about them, and I began to see that there are some things that must not be said. And I felt a kind of shame, too, when Mary turned on me. "You little Miss," she said wrathfully, "with your big eyes. An' myself bitin' on my own nerves for fear of picking up a lizard for a potato. Go play."

"I *was* playing," I tried to explain.

"Play playthings, then, and not ha'nts," said Mary.

So I never said anything more to her, save about plates and fritters and such things.

To this recital Mary Elizabeth listened sympathetically.

"There's just one great big one lives down in our cellar," she confided in turn. "Not in the wall — but out loose. When the apples and stuff go down there, I always think how glad he is."

"Are you afraid of him?" I asked.

"Afraid!" Mary Elizabeth repeated. "Why, no. Once, when I was down there, I tried to pretend there wasn't anything lived there — and *then* it was frightening and I was scared."

I understood. It would indeed be a great, lonely, terrifying world if these little friendly folk did not live in cellars, walls, attics, stair-closets and the like. Of course they were friendly. Why should they be otherwise?

"R-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-t," something went, close by Mary Elizabeth's head.

We looked up. The dimness of the ceiling was miles deep. We could not see a ceiling.

"St-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t," it went again. And this time it did not stop, and it began to be accompanied by a rumbling sound as from the very cave inside the world.

Mary Elizabeth and I took hold of hands and ran. We scrambled up the steps and escaped to the sultry welcome of bright day. Out there everything was as before. Little Harold was crossing the lawn carrying a flower-pot of water which was running steadily from the hole in the bottom. With the maternal importance of little girls, we got the jar from him and undertook to bring him more water. And when he

led us to the source of supply, this was a faucet in the side of the house just beyond a narrow, dusty, cellar window. When he turned the faucet, we were, so to speak, face to face with that R-s-t-t-t-t-t.

Mary Elizabeth and I looked at each other and looked away. Then we looked back and braved it through.

"Anyway," she said, "we were afraid of a truly thing, and not of a pretend thing."

There seemed to us, I recall, a certain loyalty in this as to a creed.

Already Delia had returned from the library. The authorities refused the ink. One might come in there and write with it, but one must not take it from the table. Calista arrived from the dining-room. A waiting-woman to the queen, she reported, was engaged in dusting the sideboard and she herself had advanced no farther than the pantry door. It remained only for Margaret Amelia and Betty to come from their farther quest bearing a green hand-bill which they thought might take the place of Calista's quarry if she returned empty-handed; but we were no nearer than before to blue and orange materials, or to any other.

We took counsel and came to a certain ancient conclusion that in union there is strength. We must, we thought we saw, act the aggressor. We moved on the stronghold together. Armed with a spoon and two bottles, we found a keeper of properties within who spooned us out the necessary ink; tea was promised to take the place of coffee if we would keep out of the house and not bother anybody any more, indefinitely; shoe-polish was conceded in a limited quantity, briefly, and under inspection; and we all descended into Aladdin's cave and easily found baskets to which red mosquito-netting was clinging in sufficient measure. Then we sat in the shade of the side lawn and proceeded to colour many waters.

It was a delicate task to cloud the clear liquid to this tint and that, to watch it change expression under our hands, pale, deepen, vary to our touch; in its heart to set jewels and to light fires. We worked with deep deliberation, testing by old standards of taste set up by at least two or three previous experiences, consulting one another's soberest judgment, occasionally inventing a new liquid. I remember that it was on that day that we first thought of bluing.

Common washing bluing, the one substance really intended for colouring water, had so far escaped our notice.

"Somebody," observed Margaret Amelia, as we worked, "ought to keep keeping a look-out to see if they're coming back."

Delia, who was our man of action, ran to the clothes-reel, which stood on the highest land of the castle grounds, and looked away over the valley.

"There's a cloud of dust on the horizon," she reported, "but I think it's Mr. Wells getting home from Caledonia."

"Wouldn't they blare their horns before they got here?" Mary Elizabeth wanted to know.

"What was a knight *for*, anyway?" Delia demanded.

"*For?*" Margaret Amelia repeated, in a kind of personal indignation. "Why, to — to — to right wrongs, of course."

Delia surveyed the surrounding scene through the diluted red ink in a glass-stoppered bottle.

"I guess I know that," she said. "But I mean, what was his job?"

We had never thought of that. Did one, then, have to have a job other than righting wrongs?

Margaret Amelia undertook to explain.

"Why," she said, "it was this way: Knights liberated damsels and razed down strongholds and took robber chieftains and got into adventures. And they lived off the king and off hermits."

"But what was the end of 'em?" Delia wanted to know. "They never married and lived happily ever after. They married and just kept right on going."

"That was on account of the Holy Grail," said Mary Elizabeth. It was wonderful, as I look back, to remember how her face would light sometimes; as just then, and as when somebody came to school with the first violets.

"The what?" said Delia.

"They woke up in the night sometimes," Mary Elizabeth recited softly, "and they saw it, in light, right there inside their dark cell. And they looked and looked, and it was all shiny and near-to. And when they saw it, they knew about all the principal things. And those that never woke up and saw it, always kept trying to, because they knew they weren't *really* ones till they saw. Most everybody wasn't really, because only a few saw it. Most of them died and never saw it at all."

"What did it look like?" demanded Delia.

"Hush!" said Calista, with a shocked glance, having somewhere picked up the impression that very sacred things, like very wicked things, must never be mentioned. But Mary Elizabeth did not heed her.

"It was all shining and near to," she repeated. "It was in a great, dark sky, with great, bright worlds falling all around it, but it was in the centre and it didn't fall. It was all still, and brighter than anything; and when you saw it, you never forgot."

There was a moment's pause, which Delia broke.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

Mary Elizabeth was clouding red mosquito-netting water by shaking soap in it, an effect much to be desired. She went on shaking the corked bottle, and looking away toward the sun slanting to late afternoon.

"I don't know how I know," she said in manifest surprise. "But I know."

We sat silent for a minute.

"Well, I'm going back to see if they're coming home from the hunt *now*," said Delia, scrambling up.

"From the *chase*," Margaret Amelia corrected her loftily, "and from the tourmey. I b'lieve," she corrected herself conscientiously, "that had ought to be tourmament."

This time Delia thought that she saw them coming, the king and his knights, with pennons and plumes, just entering Conant Street down by the Brices. As we must be ready by the time the party dismounted, there was need for the greatest haste. But we found that the clothes-reel, which was to be the fountain, must have a rug and should have flowing curtains if it were to grace a castle courtyard; so, matters having been further delayed by the discovery of Harold about to drink the vanilla water, we concluded that we had been mistaken about the approach of the knights; and that they were by now only on the bridge.

A journey to the attic for the rug and curtains resulted in delays, the sight of some cast-off garments imperatively suggesting the fitness of our dressing for the rôle we were to assume. This took some time and was accompanied by the selection of new names all around. At last, however, we were back in the yard with the rugs and the muslin curtains in place, and the array

of coloured bottles set up in rows at the top of the carpeted steps. Then we arranged ourselves behind these delicacies, in our bravery of old veils and scarves and tattered sequins. Harold was below, as a page, in a red sash. "A little foot-page," Margaret Amelia had wanted him called, but this he himself vetoed.

"Mine feet *big* feet," he defended himself.

Then we waited.

We waited, chatted amiably, as court ladies will. Occasionally we rose and scanned the street, and reported that they were almost here. Then we resumed our seats and waited. This business had distinctly palled on us all when Delia faced it.

"Let's have them get here if they're going to," she said.

So we sat and told each other that they were entering the yard, that they were approaching the dais, that they were kneeling at our feet. But it was unconvincing. None of us really wanted them to kneel or knew what to do with them when they did kneel. The whole pretence was lacking in action, and very pale.

"It was lots more fun getting ready than this is," said Calista, somewhat brutally.

We stared in one another's faces, feeling guilty of a kind of disloyalty, yet compelled to acknowledge this great truth. In our hearts we remembered to have noticed this thing before: That getting ready for a thing was more fun than doing that thing.

"Why couldn't we get a quest?" inquired Margaret Amelia. "Then it wouldn't have to stop. It'd last every day."

That was the obvious solution: We would get a quest.

"Girls can't quest, can they?" Betty suggested doubtfully.

We looked in one another's faces. Could it be true? Did the damsels sit at home? Was it only the knights who quested?

Delia was a free soul. Forthwith she made a precedent.

"Well," she said, "I don't know whether they did quest. But they can quest. So let's do it."

The reason in this appealed to us all. Immediately we confronted the problem: What should we quest for?

We stared off over the valley through which the little river ran shining and slipped beyond our horizon.

"I wonder," said Mary Elizabeth, "if it would be wrong to quest for the Holy Grail *now*."

We stood there against the west, where bright doors seemed opening in the pouring gold of the sun, thick with shining dust. The glory seemed very near. Why not do something beautiful? Why not — why not . . .

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